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# **The Journey through Meaningful Spaces: a Study of Middle-earth's Landscapes**

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## **Acknowledgements**

Far from being solely an academic fulfilment, this thesis is the product of my personal taste as reader and person. Sometimes, when we work on something that we really like, our expectations are higher than usual. The efforts and labour never seem enough. This is precisely the way I felt at some times, during the writing of my work. Nonetheless, I had the fortune to have by my side extremely encouraging and inspiring people. First of all, I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor Laura Tosi, for her patience, the knowledge she shared with me and useful critiques. Without a large request it would be difficult to achieve a great result. I also thank Professor Maierhofer for her availability as second reader, which I appreciated a lot. The period of study at the University of Graz taught me invaluable lessons, both within the classroom and outside. It also gave me the chance to meet extraordinary people and friends. I want to express all of my gratitude especially to Kristiina Varis, for being such a fixed point in my life and a supportive friend. I would also like to express my thanks to Camilla Canova, for the enthusiastic encouragement she has always provided me. It is always a pleasure to share the road with you. For all those times when this work seemed an unreachable goal, I wish to thank my friends: Francesca Favero, Giorgia Pedenzini, Sara Brouwers, Irene Annoè, Beatrice and Francesca De Luigi, who were always there to support me. For I know you will never let me lose faith in myself and what I can do, I could not have asked for better friends. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the substantial help provided by my family: grazie Mamma, Papà e Marco for the love and life-time support. This work is dedicated mostly to you.

## Note on the Text

My work required an extensive bibliographic research, with an obvious focus on all the works by J.R.R. Tolkien. In order to simplify in-text citations, as well as to avoid repetitions, a few basic guidelines must be laid out.

The complete references to Tolkien's major works are to be found both, in the first footnote which refers to that work, and in the bibliography. The subsequent references to the same work, refer all to the previously cited edition; therefore, only a shortened or reduced version of the title is provided, along with the page number (if different from the previous one). Other works repeatedly cited throughout the same paragraph or chapter, are cited after the first time only by the author's surname followed by the page number. The way titles have been shorthanded is provided as follows:

<i>The Lord of the Rings</i>	LotR
<i>The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien</i>	Letters
"On Faerie Stories"	Faerie

## INTRODUCTION

Even though *The Lord of the Rings* is a novel which reinvents a nordic and medieval mythology, it belongs to our contemporary world. Whereas the deeds of the Breton cycle or of the Nibelung might leave us non-sympathetic about them, the characters by Tolkien are “figures of our spirit”<sup>1</sup>. The book was published in 1954, after more or less 30 years of incubation. As pointed out by Ulrike Killer in *Antologia di J.R.R Tolkien*:

In 1922, when Tolkien was starting writing his romantic idea of a national epic, James Joyce was writing *Ulysses* and T.S Eliot was writing the *Waste Land*; at this time Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf and W.B Yeats were writing. The world had just changed and had entered a new phase; the Victorian age had given way to a new beginning. Consequently, literature changed.<sup>2</sup>

J.R.R Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, is to be located in such a rapidly changeable cultural climate, where the two world wars were to shape modernity. Nonetheless, when *The Lord of the Rings* was released, critic responses were not generally positive:

The book was characterized as "juvenile balderdash" by American critic Edmund Wilson in his essay “Oo, those awful Orcs”, and in 1961 Philip Toynbee wrote, somewhat prematurely, that it had "passed into a merciful oblivion". [...] W.H. Auden also criticized the book in a 1968 *Critical Quarterly* article, "Good and evil in *The Lord of the Rings*", objecting to Tolkien's conception of sentient species that are intrinsically evil without possibility of redemption.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Manni, Franco. *Introduzione a Tolkien*. Milano: Simonelli, 2002. p. 27

2 Tolkien, J.R.R., and Ulrike Killer. *Antologia Di J.R.R. Tolkien*. Milano: Rusconi, 1995. p. 411- 412

3 Tolkien Gateway contributors. "The Lord of the Rings." *Tolkien Gateway*. Tolkien Gateway, 27 Mar. 2015. Web. 3 Nov. 2016  
[http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Two\\_Trees\\_of\\_Valinor](http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Two_Trees_of_Valinor)

Despite this criticism, Tolkien surely contributed to literature; he devoted his life to the creation of a fantastic mythology, which blended fantasy, myths, pastoral and folklore. During his literary career he dedicated a great attention to language – Tolkien invented several different languages which inspired his characters – and to the establishment of fantasy as a literary genre, which can be found in his letters and essay *On Fairy-stories*. The result was the creation of a new world. Among the things which should strike the reader of *The Lord of the Rings*, the scope of its narrative is one of the first: a great vastness in the topics, settings and psychological situations – always combined with an adequate style – is present for the entire span. The accuracy of the lexicon and the rhythm of each chapter deserve to be noted, as well as coherence, which is to be found in every aspect of the novel: from the linguistic, to the temporal and spatial ones.

Since Tolkien defined *The Lord of the Rings* as a “fantastic story”, it is my purpose to start with a reflection upon the “fantastic genre”; I will therefore point out the difference between the terms “fantastic” and “fantasy”. I will take into consideration *On Fairy-stories*, as a sort of declaration of intent by the author and as a programmatic reminder of how to create a fantasy story. In this essay, Tolkien explains what he means by “fantastic” and he gives the guidelines on how his work should be interpreted. Further reflexions on fantasy then follow in the paragraphs about Epic fantasy and the Myth. In particular, as far as mythology is concerned, there are various aspects which have been taken into account. The category of myth can be declined in different ways in the Tolkienian panorama; this subchapter aims at focusing on the most discussed ones. A great part of the discourse was based upon Ursula K. Le Guin's work on myth and Jungian theories. Afterwards, I will draw my attention upon the Tolkien's apology of myth as a genre with his poem *Mythopoeia*.

Much has already been said and written about the themes of *The Lord of the Rings*, and we can find quite a lot about the fantastic as a genre. Yet, not much attention has been given to the setting in which the story of the Ring develops. Therefore, in the central chapter of my thesis, I will underline the importance of the environment in which Tolkien sets his story. A visceral love for plants and especially trees is given a great importance throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as the way man mistreats nature, which, according to Tolkien's letters<sup>4</sup>, is as difficult for the author to bear as the mistreatments man inflicts to animals. My purpose is to show how the Middle-earth described in *The Lord of the Rings*, is perceived by the reader not only as a mere space where the story develops, but ultimately as a proper character of the story. In order to do so, I will use Richard Muir's definition of "perceived landscape" and "landscape of the mind"<sup>5</sup> applied to the setting of the Shire in particular. As a setting, the Shire is perhaps one of the most evocative in the story, it is imbued with nostalgic feelings and utopian representation of life. Dealing with children's literature, T. Watkins explained: "narratives shape the way children find a 'home' in the world"<sup>6</sup>, and this is exactly what the Shire represents during the narration of *The Lord of the Rings*: it embodies the sense of home. If it is true in real life that there is a relationship between humans and their environment, I would like to consider the same process in literature, applying this idea to the setting of *The Lord of the Rings* and its characters. In Tolkien's work in particular, space acquires several connotative meanings, which impact the characters as well as the readers. The importance that the author gave to space is found in his drawings of maps of Middle-earth and the attention he

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4 Tolkien, J.R.R., Humphrey Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien. *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1981

5 See: chapter IV "Landscapes of the Mind" in Muir, Richard. *Approaches to Landscape*. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1999

6 Watkins, Tony. "Reconstructing the Homeland: Loss and Hope in the English Landscape" in: Nikolajeva, Maria. *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995. p. 165

paid to toponymy. Furthermore, Tolkien openly stated his environmental concerns, which are easily traced throughout the story, and especially in the chapter “The Scouring of the Shire”. In Tolkien's representation of nature, a recurrent symbol is that of the tree. The mythology which Tolkien created, starts from the Two Trees of Valinor<sup>7</sup>, which are said to have brought light to the elves in ancient times. Trees, above all (but not only) in the form of Ents, play a major role in the story: they have a *deus ex machina* function, and they basically save the forces of good from evil in the battle against Saruman. As Richard Mathews remarks: “The tree is a complex symbol for Tolkien, it has definite Christian echoes of both the tree of knowledge and the tree of sacrifice, the cross.”<sup>8</sup> In the last book of the trilogy, the White Tree of Gondor becomes the symbol of rebirth: the wars and evil which reigned in Middle-earth made the White Tree wither; but after Good has triumphed, a sapling tree is found growing in the waste and snow, on the battlefield. Standing for new life and prosperity, the new tree grows and blossoms. The short story *Leaf by Niggle* was written in the same period (1938-39) when *The Lord of the Rings* was beginning to take shape. It is relevant, as the symbol of the tree pervades and connects both the works. The tree has a substantial role in the story of Niggle, as it sheds light on the art of “sub-creation”.

The third chapter is devoted to the way Tolkien represents his characters. The starting point will be a reflection on characters in fantasy, compared to those of the realistic genre. Most of the times, critics seemed to have dismissed fantasy characters as shallow archetypes. They are not usually considered well-developed or even convincing at all. Yet *The Lord of the Rings* proves the contrary; I tried to give an overview of what is the

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7 See: Tolkien, J.R.R., Christopher Tolkien, and Ted Nasmith. *The Silmarillion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004

8 Mathews, Richard. *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. New York: Twayne, 1997. p. 68



character function within the narrative, and what it represents. A close look at the heroes and villains specifically is afterwards provided. After that, I will look at a peculiar category of characters, namely those which represent hybrid identities or the metamorphosis of something else (again we will see there is a strong connection between character and nature). Finally, I will try to trace back the origins of the different peoples of Middle-earth's legendarium, and to explain why *The Lord of the Rings* has had such a huge success.

## 1.0

### TOLKIEN AND FANTASY

It is well-known, thanks to his letters and biography<sup>9</sup>, that Tolkien was a university Professor whose primary interest was language – philology in particular – and the creation of an English mythology. The publication of *The Hobbit* (1937), a children's book, was just the first brick in the building of a vast epic work, which constitutes the author's legacy. In a letter to his American publishing house Houghton Mifflin Co. (1955), Tolkien explains the roots of his work and his intentions. He states that the university authorities may look at his writing and publishing “fairy-stories and romances” as “an aberration”<sup>10</sup>; they may even call it a “pardonable hobby” only because it was successful. In fact, it was not a “hobby” in the sense of something different from work or relief. Tolkien makes clear that at the basis of it there is the invention of languages. “Stories” were created in order to provide a world to the languages, and not the opposite. The name comes first, and then the story follows<sup>11</sup>. In the same letter he clarifies the semantics of *Lord of the Rings* to avoid misunderstandings. Even though Tolkien explains that his stories do not deal with anything else but themselves – and that they have no allegorical, moral, religious or political intentions – he admits that “Middle-earth is not a Neverland”. There is a relationship between it and the world we live in. The story takes place on this planet in a remote yet undefined age of the Old Continent. At the core of this letter, Tolkien discusses the literary genre of his work; he claims the so called «fantastic story\*» is one of the highest forms of

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9 Respectively: Tolkien, J.R.R., Humphrey Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien. *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1981. and :

Carpenter, Humphrey. *J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography*. London: HarperCollins, 1990

10 Tolkien, J. R. R., Humphrey Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000. p. 219

11 Ibid. 10

\* The use of the term “fantastic” here is meant as the most faithful translation for the words of the author. The difference between *fantastic* and *fantasy* will be taken in

literature, and it is a total mistake to associate it with children (166). This statement brings up two core notions that should be analysed, before proceeding further. What did Tolkien mean by “the so called «fantastic story»”? And what do we mean by it nowadays? It might not be completely right to define Tolkien's work as “fantastic”, in the sense it is usually meant in literary categorization. Some 20 years after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tzvetan Todorov published one of the most eminent works about the fantastic genre: *The Fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973). Todorov defines the fantastic as the the genre that produces hesitation in the reader; this hesitation is due to some events which cannot be explained by the rules of this world<sup>12</sup>. Todorov calls it “the very heart of the fantastic” and states that the fantastic occupies just the duration of this hesitation. According to Todorov, the fantastic exists for literary as well as social purposes. As a genre, it allows the author to talk about topics, which he could not be allowed to talk about in realistic terms. Finally, he claims that the fantastic does not really exist anymore:

[...] the supernatural and the genre which accepts it literally, the marvelous, have always existed in literature and are much in evidence today, the fantastic has had a relatively brief life span. It appeared in a systematic way around the end of the eighteenth century with Cazotte; a century later, we find the last aesthetically satisfying examples of the genre in Maupassant's tales. [...] why does the literature of the fantastic no longer exist?<sup>13</sup>

Having roughly described Todorov's categorization of the fantastic genre, it appears that Tolkien's work has almost nothing to share with this meaning of “fantastic”. Therefore, what Tolkien meant is something different.

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consideration in the next paragraphs.

12 Todorov, Tzvetan. *La Letteratura Fantastica*. Milano: Garzanti, 1983. p. 28

13 Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975. p. 166

## 1.1 Tolkien's *On Fairy-stories*

In 1939 Tolkien reflected on fantasy as literary form in his essay entitled *On fairy-stories*.

The meaning of fairy-story is very broad:

Fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories about fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is *Faërie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. *Faërie* contains many things besides elves and fays ... it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth. And all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.<sup>14</sup>

From a modern perspective, what Tolkien defines “fairy-story” corresponds to the fantasy genre. Therefore, since *The Lord of the Rings* is a fairy-story – in the sense that his author meant – it is also true that it can be ascribed to nowadays fantasy genre. Tolkien states that it is difficult to describe the meaning of fantasy with words:

The definition of fairy-story – what it is, or what it should be – does not depend on any definition or historical account of elf or fairy, but upon the nature of *Faërie*: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country. I will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done. *Faërie* cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. (Faerie, 10)

If a proper definition cannot be provided, Tolkien nonetheless attributes to fantasy some important qualities: it is a country which lives for itself, it is not possible to describe it but it is possible to perceive it, to feel it somehow. Further, fantasy is said to be most nearly translated by Magic. It is a magic intended as Art: “the human process that produces

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14 Tolkien, J.R.R. *Tree and Leaf*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2001. p. 9

Secondary Belief” (53). Regarding secondary belief, Donald Haase noted:

Tolkien's concept of fantasy literature is based on the suspension of disbelief. Genuine and skillful fantasy creates a “secondary” belief (unlike the so-called “primary” belief of myth and religion), putting the reader in a temporary state of enchantment. As soon as suspension of disbelief is disturbed, the spell is broken and, Tolkien adds, art has failed.<sup>15</sup>

Having said this, the sense of fantasy becomes the more and more complicated:

the borders of fairy-story are inevitably dubious. The magic of Faërie is not an end in itself, its virtue is in its operations: among these are the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires. One is to survey the depths of space and time. Another is to hold communion with other living things. (Faerie, 13)

Therefore, as in Todorov's fantastic, fantasy exists for a social purpose. Man needs it to satisfy primordial human desires, to deal with things which cannot be dealt with in real life. Tolkien identifies these repressed desires with the interest in the size of space and time, and the necessity man has to share – “hold communion” – with others. In order to detect a fantasy story without a definition of what it is, we need to understand what is not to be considered a fantasy story. A dream-story cannot be fantasy: “if a waking writer tells you that his tale is only a thing imagined in his sleep, he cheats deliberately the primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realisation, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder” (14). Nor can it be a “Beast-fable”: in stories in which no human being is concerned, or in which the animals are the heroes and men are mere adjuncts ... in these we have beast-fable and not fantasy-story (15-16).

As far as the origins of fantasy stories are concerned, Tolkien writes that their history is “probably more complex than the physical history of the human race, and as

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<sup>15</sup> Haase, Donald. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008. p. 331

complex as the history of human language” (21). Fantasy begins when “Man becomes a sub-creator” (23) of a new, fantastic, world. Sub-creation links fantasy to mythology, and there it is where the origins of fantasy are to be traced back. The two genres influenced one another as “the Cauldron of Story, has always been boiling, and to it have continually been added new bits, dainty and undainty” (27).

A fantasy story does not become successful just because the reader is capable of literary belief (that is “willing suspension of disbelief”). In fact:

What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. (Faerie, 37)

Therefore, “Secondary Belief” is the true “enchanted state” in which the reader should be in order to enjoy fantasy works. The suspension of disbelief is placed at a “lower level”. Tolkien links fantasy and childhood as children are more likely to achieve secondary belief; in presence of a fairy-story, adults rather tend to feel a “sentimental state of mind”, which push them to suspend disbelief. According to Tolkien, there are no proofs that the enchantment of secondary belief is easier to work with children. He thinks it is “an adult illusion produced by children's humility, their lack of critical experience and vocabulary and their voracity” (38). The enjoyment of a story does not depend on the possibility that it can happen in real life. It depends on desirability: “If they [fairy-stories] awaken *desire*, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeed” (41). Desire is as common in children as it is in adults, and besides: “if fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults. They will, of course, put more in and get more

out than children can” (45).

At this point, Tolkien points to what fairy-stories have to offer to their readers: “Fantasy, Recovery, Escape and Consolation”(46). In order to avoid ambiguity in the use of the term “fantasy”, a clarification is necessary. Fairy-stories in the sense that Tolkien means, correspond – with some exceptions – to what nowadays we call fantasy stories. But, when Tolkien deals with Fantasy he does not describe a genre, or a fantasy story. He uses Fantasy to mean “the Sub-creative Art in itself and a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image [...] Fantasy is a natural human activity [...] it remains a human right” (47-56). Fantasy must not be confused with Imagination, which Tolkien defines as “the mental power of image-making”, while Art is defined as “the achievement of the expression, which gives (or seems to give) 'the inner consistency of reality'” (47) and which results in Sub-creation. Fantasy in this sense is very hard to be achieved: it requires a powerful imagination to be shaped – thanks to words – into sub-creative art. When Fantasy proves to be successful, it turns the writer into a Maker, and the reader into someone able to benefit from Recovery, Escape and Consolation.

In order to create Fantasy, the first step is Recovery. The (aspiring) artist needs to “re-gain a clear view” of the materials needed for Fantasy, “so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity – from possessiveness.” (58) In other words, after we have looked back to the art which came before us, we need to look at the ingredients in the Cauldron of stories from a new, fresh perspective, as if it was the first time – like a child would do. In this way it is possible to see things as we are meant to see them. This process of recognition involves the author as well as the reader. If for the author, Recovery is a preliminary, necessary condition in the process of creation, for the reader it is one of the main positive effects which the reading of a fantasy story offers. It

gives the reader the faculty of looking at things in a simpler, more genuine way. As for Escape and Consolation, Tolkien states that they are closely linked. Fantasy stories do not constitute the only means to escape from the Primary world, but they are said to be “the most obvious and (to some) outrageous forms of 'escapist' literature” (60). But what do we mean by “escape from the Primary world?” For instance, as Tolkien notes: “not to mention electric street-lamps of mass-produced pattern in your tale is Escape” (61). Tolkien considers “Escape” the urge to evade from the negative aspects of every-day life. Escape constitutes one of the main functions of fairy-stories and as such, it is regarded as positive for the reader; indeed:

Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it” (Faerie, 60).

The escapist deals with “more permanent and fundamental things” (62) than his opponents. If we look again at the electric street-lamps example, the escapist will more likely talk about lightning instead, Tolkien notes. In experiencing Fantasy, the reader gains Recovery of the true meaning of things and he is able to Escape for a while from the primary world. Finally, he experiences Consolation. The consolation which derives from the reading and understanding of successful fantasy stories proves to be necessary for several reasons. First, Tolkien says, we are living in such days which produce “the desire to escape, not indeed from life, but from our present time and self-made misery [...] we are acutely conscious both of the ugliness of our works, and of their evil” (65). The desire to escape belongs especially to our time, to modernity, since the world is no more dominated by its natural laws, but by “progressive things like factories, or the machine-guns and bombs”



(64). Then:

There are other things more grim and terrible to fly from than the noise, stench, ruthlessness, and extravagance of the internal-combustion engine. There are hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death. And even when men are not facing hard things such as these, there are ancient limitations from which fairy-stories offer a sort of escape, and old ambitions and desires (touching the very roots of fantasy) to which they offer a kind of satisfaction and consolation. (Faerie, 66)

The oldest and deepest desire, the so called “Great Escape” (68), is the Escape from Death. In fantasy stories in particular, it is possible to find many examples of the escape from death. But, Tolkien concludes, far more important than that is the Consolation of the Happy Ending. It is as essential to fantasy stories as tragedy is to Drama. He creates the word “Eucatastrophe” to indicate “the form of fairy-tale, and its highest function” (68). It consists of a sudden positive turn in the story, which then resolves in a happy ending. As a result, the reader can expect to feel some kind of joy after the reading:

The peculiar quality of the 'joy' in successful Fantasy can be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. It is not only a 'consolation' for the sorrow of this world, but a satisfaction, and an answer to this question, 'Is it true?' The answer to this question [...] is : 'If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true in that world.' (Faerie, 71)

*The Lord of the Rings*, along with the other works by Tolkien set in Middle-earth, belongs to the fantasy tradition of secondary-world. The formal explanations which Tolkien gave in his essay, contributed to the study and canonization of fantasy as a genre. Despite this, even now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

The definition of fantasy is often imprecise and ambiguous. In different sources, the concept of fantasy, fairy-tale, literary fairy-tale, gothic tale, utopia and science fiction may overlap and sometimes are used interchangeably, without further

argument. Even in studies devoted to fantasy, there is no consensus about the distinctive characteristics of this genre, or about the scope of texts it encompasses. Moreover, there is no agreement about fantasy being a genre at all. It is treated as a style, a mode, or narrative technique. Fantasy has been defined as a metaphoric mode, opposed to realism and metonymic. Fantasy literature is a conscious creation, wherein authors choose the form that suits them best for their particular purposes. Fantasy is also an eclectic genre, borrowing traits from myth, epic, romance, picaresque, gothic tale, mystery, science-fiction and others.<sup>16</sup>

The notion of “Secondary-world” is still used to make a difference between high and low fantasy, which differ on the basis of setting. As Kenneth Zahorski and Robert Boyer (1982) point out:

The low one is set in the primary world – that is reality. It offers no explanation for its non-rational happenings. High fantasy is set in secondary worlds where there are plausible explanations in those other-worlds settings, that point to magical (fairy tales) or supernatural (myth-based) causality<sup>17</sup>.

As we have seen, the fantasy genre in literature has been studied and redefined continuously since the time when Tolkien was writing. And still nowadays there is no consistency in the terminology used to describe it, nor in the categories in which fantasy is divided. In *Introduzione a Tolkien* by Franco Manni (2002) for instance, the fantastic is subdivided in fantasy, science-fiction and horror<sup>18</sup>. He uses the term “fantasy” to define the works in which the rules of reality are altered. In *The Lord of the Rings* all the non-human creatures and the magic of some characters break the rules of reality and physics.

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16 Ibid. 15

17 Zahorski, Kenneth and Robert Boyer. “The Secondary Worlds of High Fantasy”. In: Schlobin, Roger C. *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame, 1982. p. 59-60

18 Manni, Franco. *Introduzione a Tolkien*. Milano: Simonelli, 2002. p. 15

Therefore, if we look for a label to give to *The Lord of the Rings*, it will for sure be that of “fantasy” (16).

Colin Manlove, the author of *The Fantasy Literature of England* (1999), states that the beginning of English fantasy is uneven, therefore it is difficult to trace back how it has developed in time. Even so, he provides a definition for the term:

The definition of fantasy [in this book] is «a fiction involving the supernatural or impossible», which fits with the English preoccupation with the supernatural. 'Supernatural' implies the presence of some form of magic or the numinous, from ghosts and fairies to gods and devils; impossible means what simply could not be [...] <sup>19</sup>

Manlove identifies six different types of fantasy, depending on their syntactic and semantic aspects. The first one is the secondary world fantasy, in which the writer invents a new world with its own rules, where to set his story; “secondary world fantasy involves construction rather than deconstruction” (4). In Manlove's definition as well, *The Lord of the Rings* belongs to this category. The author then enlists the other types: metaphysical fantasy, emotive fantasy, comic fantasy, subversive fantasy and children's fantasy. Even though these six groups are quite distinct, each having its own features, they overlap with one another; for instance: “*The Lord of the Rings* belongs first to the secondary world category, but it also has qualities of emotive fantasy in its pastoralism and desire”(6). Among the “motives” of fantastic secondary worlds, Manlove identifies escapism and the English inclination to “hobbies and model-making”, which considers the building of a fictional world as “say, a model-railway landscape”(38). Tolkien's escapism consists in the rejection of the modern world of mass-production and mechanized warfare, in favour of a “medievalized” secondary world devoid of technology (49).

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<sup>19</sup> Manlove, C.N. *The Fantasy Literature of England*. New York: St. Martin's, 1999. p. 3

In order to define Tolkien's work more specifically, it is useful to look at some sort of “timeline” of the fantasy genre. Concerning this, D. Haase (2008) writes:

Most scholars agree that E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Nutcracker and the Mouseking* (1816) matches most definitions of fantasy and is therefore recognized as a pioneering work, even though many other novels by the German Romantics might claim priority. [...] Fantasy emerged as a significant tradition in Britain in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the work of authors such as L. Carroll, C. Kingsley and G. MacDonald. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, E. Nesbit, responding to impulses from many predecessors, renewed and transformed the fantasy tradition [...] The golden age of English-language fantasy arrived in the 1950s and 60s, with the work of writers such as J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, U. Le Guin and A. Garner.<sup>20</sup>

If there is still not an agreement regarding a definition of the fantasy genre, Tolkien is always pointed as a founder of the so called “golden age of English-language fantasy”. His notion of “Secondary world fantasy” has further been developed by critics. Zahorski and Boyer note that there are different approaches to secondary worlds: the first is the creation of a remote secondary world; the second is the juxtaposition of the primary and the secondary world with magical portals as gateways between them; and last, worlds-within-worlds.<sup>21</sup> As far as Middle-earth is concerned, the primary world is ignored completely, both from a physical and a geographical point of view, and: “as a secondary world, it is vaguely defined in terms of its relationship to our world and time. It can also be classified as set in the primary world of the very distant past; its milieu is mythic/legendary in nature.” (Zahorski and Boyer, 60)

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 15, p. 329-330

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 17

## 1.2 The Epic Fantasy

*The Lord of the Rings* is written in a “consciously archaic 'high' style and full of motifs drawn from epics and myths” (Haase, 303). Not only was Tolkien deeply interested in the idea of myth, but it was in his intention to create a new mythology for England. In the Preface to the *Silmarillion* we find a letter to Milton Waldman in which Tolkien writes:

But an equally basic passion of mine ab initio was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world (accessible to me) for my appetite. [...] I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country.<sup>22</sup>

Tolkien's purpose was to blend together “myth, legend and romantic fairy-story”; the result is an unprecedented text in the English panorama. The only epic work which belongs to the English or rather, Anglo-saxon tradition is *Beowulf*. Tolkien studied the poem and was surely inspired by it. Still, *Beowulf* is an epic poem, which means, it is: “a poem, typically derived from ancient oral tradition, which celebrates in the form of a continuous narrative the achievements of one or more heroic characters of history or legend”<sup>23</sup>. Despite its epic inspirations, *The Lord of the Rings* appears to be different from *Beowulf*, first of all in its form and secondly for its content, which is not purely epic. In the same way it is not possible to state that the characters of Middle-earth provide a proper mythology, which can

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22 Tolkien, J.R.R., Christopher Tolkien, and Ted Nasmith. *The Silmarillion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004

23 "Epic, n. and adj." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2016. Web. 24 November 2016. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/epic>

be defined as: “a traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenon”<sup>24</sup>. *The Lord of the Rings* is something in between: the idea of “epic fantasy” is probably what suits it the best. In *Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy*, Michael Moorcock defines the term as: “that body of prose fiction distinguished from myth, legend and folk-tale by its definite authorship and because it does not genuinely purport to be a true account of historical or religious events”<sup>25</sup> The author looks at epic fantasy as a late development of the Romantic Revival, which started in 1762 with Macpherson's *Ossian* cycle and continued through the Gothic novel tradition and the first generation of English Romantics. Its roots are to be traced in the epics of Gilgamesh, Ulysses, Finn Mac Coul, Siegfried, Arthur, Charlemagne and the Icelandic sagas by Morris (14-15). Moorcock includes only three titles in his definition of epic fantasy, namely: *The Lord of the Rings*, *Conan the Conqueror* by Robert E. Howard and *Palmerin of England* by Francisco de Moraes (22). All of these works belong to high fantasy. It is interesting that, what Moorcock remarks of *Lord of the Rings* in particular, is that its prose is:

the prose of the nursery-room. It is a lullaby; it is meant to soothe and console. It is frequently enjoyed not for its tensions but for its lack of tensions. It coddles; it makes friends with you; it tells you comforting lies [...] It is the predominant tone of *The Lord of the Rings* [...] and it is the main reasons why these books are successful. (122)

The mood – the emotion the author seeks to instill in the reader – of *The Lord of the Rings*

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24 "Myth, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2016. Web. 24 November 2016. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/myth>

25 Moorcock, Michael. *Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy*. London: Gollancz, 1987. p. 21

might sometimes evoke the one which lullabies and children's books convey; nonetheless, it cannot be claimed that it is so during the whole narration. As is proper of such a long story, there are many settings and situations which are described, each having their one style and tone – if by “tone” Moorcock meant the use of a certain language to reveal an attitude about the subject matter. At the beginning, the reader finds himself in the Shire – the bucolic land of the hobbits – therefore, the tone is sentimental; it is the sort of tone we can expect from a fairy-tale. But as soon as the setting changes and new situations take place, the style of the prose changes accordingly. The narration acquires a fast pace during sieges and pursuits, it becomes elegiac when the son of King Theoden is buried and it turns solemn when King Aragorn is crowned. The “comfort” which the reader experiences can be attributed to the Consolation proper of successful Fantasy, and not to the “limited prose and style” which Moorcock denoted. Differently from Moorcock, writer Ursula Le Guin praised Tolkien's narrative skills; in the essay *From Elfland to Poughkeepsie* (1973), she deals with the style of fantasy and of epic fantasy in particular. The essay is quite relevant as it tries to explain the reasons behind epic fantasy and she points at Tolkien's saga as a successful example. She begins by noticing that most epics, whether prose or verse, are written in straightforward language. And what she calls “heroic fantasy” is a modern descendent of the epic. She identifies “clarity and simplicity” as the permanent virtues in a narrative, and even though plain language is the noblest of all, she admits it is the most difficult to write into. A great quality in Tolkien's narration is his plain, clear English:

its outstanding virtue is its flexibility, its variety. It ranges easily from the commonplace to the stately, and can slide into metrical poetry as in the Tom Bombadil episode, without the careless reader's even noticing. Tolkien's vocabulary is not striking; he has no ichor; everything is direct, concrete and simple. (79)

For Le Guin, style has a primary role in the creation of worthy fantasy stories. It is not to be considered just an ingredient of a book. Style is what makes the book what it is. Without the style, what we have left is merely a summary of the story. Fantasy, much more than history and fiction, requires style to be successful (80). The reason why it is of such fundamental importance in fantasy, is because fantasy is composed entirely of the writer's vision of the secondary world:

there is no comfortable matrix of the common place to substitute for the imagination, to provide ready-made emotional response, and to disguise flaws and failures of creation [...] To create what Tolkien calls a 'secondary universe' is to make a new world. A world where no voice has ever spoken before; where the act of speech is the act of creation. The only voice that speaks there is the creator's voice. And every word counts. (81)

The appropriate style appears to be as necessary to fine epic fantasy as an intriguing plot, and maybe even more. This of course does not mean that the content of a story, the events, the message which the story conveys, is not important. As for the contents of epic fantasy, the values which are praised in the epic genre, are notably chivalric ideals of loyalty, perseverance, compassion, courage. Tolkien maintains the moral values characteristic of the epic, in order to give his work the same hue of universality in the message. Further in her essay, Le Guin asks herself the question "What is fantasy?", the answer encompasses two levels: first, fantasy is no more than a game, played for fun. On the second level, it is art:

It is a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence. It is not anti-rational, but para-rational; not realistic, but surrealist, superrealistic, a heightening of reality. In Freud's terminology, it



employs primary, not secondary process of thinking. It employs archetypes, which, as Jung warned us, are dangerous things.<sup>26</sup>

Such a definition is important as it draws attention to Jung's theories and the subconscious of the reader. Indeed, what fantasy adds to epic, is the involvement of the subconscious of the reader in the reception of the work. To cite Le Guin once more: “a fantasy is a journey. It is a journey into the subconscious mind just as psychoanalysis is. Like psychoanalysis, it can be dangerous; and *it will change you*” (80). Le Guin is not the only one who underlined the connection between psychoanalysis and epic fantasy. To go back to Moorcock, he showed interest in this aspect of epic fantasy too. Further in his work *Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy*, he states that fantasy stories reflect the internal landscapes of the author's mind; as a consequence, the secondary worlds of fantasy are “external equivalents of the inner world of the psyche” (16). Finally, he concludes saying:

a good fantasy story should be able to lead us to greater self-understanding. Therefore, the main fascination of the fantasy story could lie in its manipulation of direct subconscious symbols [...] Epic fantasy can offer a world of metaphor in which to explore the rich, hidden territories deep within us. (16-17)

*The Lord of the Rings* is actually able to lead its readers to a greater self-understanding. Even though characters and events are not to be read as allegories, causes for reflection are not missing; for instance, it is easy for a reader to identify the human condition with that of the protagonist, Frodo: every person feels he or she is bearing some kind of burden, and it is up to one's conscience how we get rid of it or, whether we let it consume us. Consequently, it seems that, on a deep level, the content of epic fantasy is mostly

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<sup>26</sup> Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. London: Women's, 1989. p.71

symbolic, even when the author does not completely intend it to be so. Such psychoanalytic reading of epic fantasy is of a great relevance at this point, when I approach the category of myth.

### 1.3 The Myth

As we have seen, *The Lord of the Rings* is a rich piece of fantasy which blends epics as well as myths and pastoralism. Tolkien notably drew inspiration from Norse mythology to create Middle-earth. The category of myth is present at different levels in *The Lord of the Rings*, in the sense that nordic mythology is a source of inspiration for the story, but myth as such represents also a model to be improved on and adapted. Concerning Mythological approaches, Russian formalist scholar Vladimir Propp studied myths and fairy-tales, and in *Historical Roots of the Wondertale* (1946), he states that fairy tales are descendants of myths<sup>27</sup>. They emerged in the moment when people no longer believed in myths, probably in order to fill the human need for stories. According to Propp, there are basically two patterns of myths – “the initiation of young people [...] and those related to the shaman's trip to the otherworld.” (656) Such mythical journeys find a parallel in the trips which heroes in fairy tales make. Moreover, A. Dundes and E.M. Meletinsky, developing Propp's studies, showed that fairy tales and myths share the “basic structure of 'lack/lack liquidated’” (657), for which the plot begins with the lack of something, but in the end everything is resolved for the best and the previous situation is overcome. The main difference between fairy tale and myth is that the latter “discusses collective values and the fate of a group”, while in fairy tales the focus is on the individual life of the protagonist, who elevates himself from a low status to a high one, usually through marriage (Meletinsky, 657). From the point of view of Structuralism, it seems *The Lord of the Rings* belongs more to the myth tradition than to that of fairy tale. Indeed, Tolkien's aim was the creation of a new mythology which he felt was lacking in British culture. But what is the purpose in the creation of a mythology? Why was it so important for Tolkien? Ursula Le

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<sup>27</sup> Haase, Donald. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008. p. 656

Guin's theories prove to be useful again to answer such questions. In her essay *Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction* (1976), she gives her interpretation of what myths represent for humanity. Even though it is true that Le Guin writes about myth in science fiction – and not in epic fantasy – still, for my purpose her definitions are applicable:

'Myth is an attempt to explain, in rational terms, facts not yet rationally understood'. That is the definition provided by the reductive, scientific mentality of the first half of the twentieth century and still accepted by many. [...] However, the rational and explanatory is only one function of the myth. Myth is an expression of one of the several ways the human being, body/psyche, perceives, understands and relates to the world. [...] To pretend that it can be replaced by abstract or quantitative cognition is to assert that the human being is potentially or ideally a creature of pure reason, a disembodied Mind.<sup>28</sup>

As we are not creatures seeking facts and explanations and anything more than that, there must be some other reasons behind the creation of myths. Even nowadays – at the age in which science seems to be able to answer most questions – authors choose to study and invent new mythological stories. In the lecture “Beowulf: the Monster and the Critics” (1936), Tolkien argues that: “the great strength of this early English masterpiece lies in its mythological embodiment of radical evil in the dragon, a malevolent force so great that man can never expect complete victory over it”.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, in *Beowulf* as well as in *The Lord of the Rings* mythological creatures are the means through which the author represents the great powers and forces, which have been existing in the world since the beginning of human life. Humankind will never be short of monsters to exorcise. That is probably why we will always go back to old myths, and authors will create new ones. As a

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28 Ibid. 26 p. 61-62

29 Mathews, Richard. *Fantasy: the liberation of imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2002. p. 64

matter of fact, popular fantasy stories affect our culture, they create new myths. Concerning this, further on her essay, Le Guin points at such myths:

I would call it the area of Submyth: by which I mean those images, figures and motifs which have no religious resonance and no intellectual or aesthetic value, but which are vigorously alive and powerful, so that they cannot be dismissed as mere stereotypes. They are shared by all of us; they are genuinely collective.<sup>30</sup>

Some myths speak like universal categories, they have told the same truth along the centuries and in various cultures. They work in the same way for everyone, as we all connect some images to others likewise. In order to explain such process of association, Le Guin points to the unconscious. She says the roots of myth find their fertile ground in the psyche, and maybe beyond there, in a place which Jung defined “collective” (65). *The Lord of the Rings* is full of Jungian archetypes; indeed, in 2009 Pia Skogemann, director of studies of co-founder of The C.G. Jung Institute Copenhagen, published *Where the Shadows Lie: A Jungian Interpretation of Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*, that is a Jungian approach in interpreting Tolkien's story. From the book, it emerges that the theories by Jung and the mythology by Tolkien go towards the same direction, whose ultimate point of arrival is what Jung called the “Collective Unconscious”<sup>31</sup>. In short, mythological creatures work as symbols – archetypes, for our mind; these symbols are interpreted in the same way by everyone as they possess the category of universality – they all belong to the collective unconscious. To conclude, I wish to go back to the end of Le Guin's essay on Myth and Archetype: “if Jung is right, and we all have the same kind of dragons in our psyche, [...] It does imply that nobody can invent an archetype by taking thought, any more than we can

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30 Ibid. 26 p. 64

31 Skogemann, Pia. *Where the shadows lie: a Jungian interpretation of Tolkien's The lord of the Rings*. Wilmette, IL: Chiron Publications, 2009. p.2

invent a new organ in our body” (67). Nevertheless, myths can be rewritten and readapted, provided that they are created with originality by an author, and they are not a mere adaptation of a pre-existing myth. Tolkien succeeded in this enterprise; Le Guin notes that he created an archetypal image, that of the ring of power, which can be seen as every person's mission in life. Such a myth, does not disappear after a rational examination. It gets more and more real with the passing of time, and it acquires more meaning the more one thinks about it.

### **1.3.1 Mythopoeia, or myth-making**

As we have seen already, myth is not only present in *The Lord of the Rings*, at the level of Jung's archetypes and sub-conscious. Tolkien created a new mythology, his characters and the setting represent ante-tempus, heroic ancestors for the English people and England. Tolkien probably considered myth in the same way as folklorists do, that is:

Stories about grand events in ancient times, often discussing the origin of the present world, of its order and of different objects, phenomena, and creatures. [...] Whereas fairy tales are fictional and profane narratives [...] regarded as unreal by the teller and the audience, myths are believed to be true. [...] Mythical events take place in the distant past and do not focus on human experience as legends do, but instead on the life of deities. This contrastive approach to myths, fairy tales, and legends does not mean that the three genres have no connection.<sup>32</sup>

*The Lord of the Rings* is just one part of the vast world which Tolkien imagined. In the *Silmarillion*, we find the creation of the world by the elves and the beginning of the story,

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32 Ibid. 27 p. 652

which then is followed by the *Hobbit* and the story of the Ring. The mythology by Tolkien is cosmogonic, it tells how the cosmos and all the creatures came into being. Middle-earth is seriously threatened by evil, and the world is constantly treading a fine line. Concerning this, Haase notes:

In most mythologies, the world is not eternal but will eventually be destroyed. Myths that discuss the “ultimate” topics are called “eschatological” (the Greek *eschatos* meaning “last, furthest”). Sometimes hope is expressed in a new creation and in a better world after life on earth has been destroyed in huge catastrophes. The mythical concept of time thus tends to be cyclical.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, if in the *Silmarillion* we find the cosmogonic part of Tolkien's mythology, it is in *The Lord of the Rings* where it becomes eschatological as well. The world is about to be conquered by evil, which will eventually end up with self-destruction. Even though in the end, the materialization of evil – that is the One Ring – is destroyed, the world as it was before changes forever. The elves depart from Middle-earth, Gandalf and Frodo follow them. The new era is the one of Men and it is the one which leads to us, to the present. The reader is left with a sense of loss and melancholy, even with the triumph of good. The eucatastrophe<sup>34</sup> – the positive turn in the events, which recalls Christian divine providence, does not lead to the re-establishment of an old order; a new order begins and the rules of the world are re-arranged. Manlove noted this already:

Tolkien's *The Hobbit* is subtitled 'There and Back again', and the same title might apply to *The Lord of the Rings*, in which the quest begins and ends in the Shire. [...] The dynamic of time and its wearing action is present, but in the form of what is lost of the old rather than of what is gained of the new.<sup>35</sup>

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33 Ibid. 27 p. 654

34 More on “Eucatastrophe” on p. 15

35 Sandner, David. *Fantastic literature: a critical reader*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004. p.

As it seems to be common in fantasy, the direction of the narrative is circular, rather than evolutionary or dynamic. The creation of a mythological series of stories, lets us assume that Tolkien had a particular liking for such genre. The centrality of myth in Tolkien's literary production is made apparent in his letter to Milton Waldman (1951). There he explains the way in which his mythology was born and later organized:

The cycles begin with a cosmogonical myth: the *Music of the Ainur*. God and the Valar [...] are revealed. [...] It moves then swiftly to the *History of the Elves*, or the *Silmarillion* proper; to the world as we perceive it, but of course transfigured in a still half-mythical mode: that is it deals with rational incarnate creatures of more or less comparable stature with our own. [...] Its centre of view and interest is not Men but 'Elves'. Men came in inevitably [...] But they remain peripheral – late comers, and however growingly important, not principals. [...] *The Lord of the Rings*, much the largest, and I hope also in proportion the best, of the entire cycle, concludes the whole business.

In this programmatic and explanatory excerpt of letter, Tolkien shows clearly his will to shape his material into a proper mythology. The originality of his work does not lie only in the invention of the hobbits, but also in the creation of a mythology in which the protagonists are not men or gods, but creatures of Faërie, of pure fantasy. In other words, Tolkien adopts a mythological approach to fantasy-story, which results in epic fantasy. To conclude the excursus on myth, it is important to cite the poem *Mythopoeia*<sup>36</sup> (from the Greek, “myth-making”). Tolkien believed so greatly in the importance of myths, that in 1931 he wrote *Mythopoeia*, as an apology and praise to the creation of myths. The idea of

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36 Tolkien, J.R.R. *Tree and Leaf*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2001. p. 85



such a poem came to his mind, when author and friend C.S. Lewis told him “myths are lies, and therefore worthless, even though (they are) breathed through silver”<sup>37</sup>. The concept at the core of the poem, is that myth-making represents a creative art about “fundamental things”. At the beginning of the composition, Tolkien praises our ancestors, the first creators of myths. In the same way they named all the things, they also brought “great powers” out from themselves: those of fantasy, imagination and myth-making. Our ancestors believed Elves and mythological creatures were their predecessors. Myths are fundamental for our world, without them it would be empty. Man is not a liar, he is the creature of God, therefore myths – man's stories, cannot be lies:

The heart of man is not compound of lies,  
but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,  
and still recalls him. Though now long estranged,  
man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.

Myth-making is regarded as a creative power, which parallels the one God has; the author thus becomes a sub-creator – as we know, Tolkien explains this more extensively in *On Fairy-stories*. From the author's perspective, myths, carrying archaic universal truths, have the power to shed light on the darkness, which tries to dominate the world (in the form of false gods, such as Industrialization). Since God endowed Man with imagination, imaginative stories must in some way have been born with God, and therefore they must reflect something of his eternal truth. For Tolkien, the myth represents the essence of humanity, and myth-makers are those able to recognize the truth: “It is not they that have forgot the Night” (88). Probably, here Tolkien was pointing at progress in the form of street-lamp, guilty of faking daylight, of lying. Therefore, as myth is truth, technological

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<sup>37</sup> Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and Their Friends*, HarperCollins, 1997. p. 42

progress represents deceit and de-humanization: “counterfeit at that [myth], machine-produced, bogus seduction of the twice-seduced.” Tolkien adopts a peculiar position towards progress – which will be even more evident when looking at landscape in the story – he has a reactionary attitude to what he perceives as “unfruitful course”, and he juxtaposes myth to it, as it bears truth in man's life. It is likely that Tolkien valued myth to such a great extent, because it usually tells stories about the past. Past times are reassuring as they are certain, definite. Regarding this, Professor Stephen J. Tonsor noted:

It is precisely because religion and myth accomplish the ordering of experience, particularly in the moment of crisis when we confront life's border situations with a sense of anomie and loss of reality and identity that mythic thinking in its great variety has reappeared with some intensity in the Western world at the present time. The great cultural and civilizational crises of our times have driven the human spirit back to the basic ordering patterns of archaic man.<sup>38</sup>

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38 Tonsor, Stephen. "The Use and the Abuse of Myth." *Intercollegiate Studies Institute: Educating for Liberty*. N.p., 08 Oct. 2014. Web. 12 Sept. 2017.  
<https://home.isi.org/use-and-abuse-myth>

## 2.0

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SPACE: PERCEIVED LANDSCAPES

“Place is far from being an unproblematic aspect of story”

(Michael Irwin, *Maps of Fictional Space*)

Since *The Lord of the Rings* is a secondary world fantasy story, the descriptions of the secondary world – of the places which compose it – are fundamental for the reader, in order to let him picture the story in his mind. The appeal of a fantasy book, most of the times depends in great measure on how the imaginative world impacts the reader. A major importance has been given to the reception of setting and environment since the mid of the twentieth century: “The development of serious frameworks for the investigation and understanding of the nature of perceptions about environments, landscapes and places began in the late 1940s and gathered momentum during the two following decades.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a scientific interest on the perceptions about landscape, developed in the same period when *The Lord of the Rings* was published.

Tolkien was notoriously a meticulous author, every detail of each leaf described in the story, is carefully chosen. Middle-earth counts different types of landscapes, most of which mirrors in some way their inhabitants. A peculiarity in Tolkien's descriptions, is that the reader is not presented with detailed information of how a land is, he needs to work with his imagination in order to picture it. Therefore, for instance, when in the Prologue to *The Lord of the Rings* the narrator describes the Shire, he says:

The land was *rich* and *kindly*, and though it had long been deserted when they

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<sup>1</sup> Muir, Richard. *Approaches to landscape*. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1999. p.

entered it, it had before been *well tilled*, and there the king had once had many *farms, cornlands, vineyards, and woods*. Forty leagues it stretched from the *Far Downs* to the *Brandywine Bridge*, and fifty from the *northern moors* to the *marshes* in the south. The Hobbits named it the Shire, as the region of the authority of their Thain, and a district of *well-ordered business*; and there in that *pleasant corner of the world* they plied their well-ordered business of living, and they heeded less and less *the world outside where dark things moved*, until they came to think that *peace and plenty* were the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk. (my emphasis)

It is probable that an implied reader at this point already has a picture of the Shire in his or her mind, even though not that many attributes were used. Soon after, when Hobbits are described, the picture of the Shire will be complete in the reader's mind; through the reading of the behaviours and characteristics of Hobbits, it is possible for the readers to shape their image of the land as well. As N.I. Agøy noted:

*The Lord of the Rings* [...] invites participation, in many subtle ways. Then, too, we simply *have to* contribute something of our own if we are to visualize what happens in it. Tolkien's descriptions are rarely very detailed. People, buildings and objects are usually described more or less as the scenery or weather is described, quite vaguely, that is; as seen from a distance.<sup>2</sup>

Tolkien does not usually spend a lot of pages on descriptions in *The Lord of the Rings*; when he describes an environment he prefers sensuous metaphors, rather than a direct visual description of a place. There is a reason behind his choice, as he stated, concerning visualizations:

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2 Agøy, Nils Ivar. *Vague or Vivid? Descriptions in The Lord of the Rings*. in: Tolkien Studies: an annual scholarly review. Vol. X: West Virginia University Press, 2013. Web. 11 Jan. 2017. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/513820/pdf>

The radical distinction between all art (including drama) that offers a *visible* presentation and true literature is that it imposes one visible form. Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive. It is at once more universal and more poignantly particular. If it speaks of *bread* or *wine* or *stone* or *tree*, it appeals to the whole of these things, to their ideas; yet each hearer will give to them a peculiar personal embodiment in his imagination<sup>3</sup>.

The evocative way in which Tolkien describes the environment, is a tool specifically used to let his literature speak differently from mind to mind; in other words, he depicts some images and then lets each individual's mind do the rest through connotations or association of ideas. In fact, as D.W. Meinig explained in his essay "The Beholding Eye" (1979):

Take a small but varied company to any convenient viewing place overlooking some portion of city and countryside and have each, in turn, describe the "landscape" [...]. It will soon be apparent that even though we gather together and look in the same direction at the same instant, we will not – we cannot – see the same landscape. We may certainly agree that we will see many of the same elements – houses, roads, trees, hills – in terms of such denotations as number, form, dimension, and color, but such facts take on meaning only through association; they must be fitted together according to some coherent body of ideas. Thus we confront the central problem: any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads.<sup>4</sup>

When looking at a landscape, be it a real, tangible one or an imaginary landscape which we envision in our mind, the associations which we do clearly do not depend solely on what we see or read. On the contrary, the greatest part of the job requires personal connections

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3 Tolkien, J. R. R. *Tree and Leaf*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2001. Note E. p. 77-78

4 Meinig, D. W. et al. *The Interpretation of ordinary landscapes: geographical essays*. New York: Oxford U Press, 1979. p. 33-34

between feelings and what is seen or read. All imaginative products will thus have the same basic input with different output. This is, of course, true of every description of a place, but it is particularly relevant in *The lord of the Rings*. When Tolkien decided not to describe the Shire “physically”, but through associations and allusive terms, such as: “*farms, cornlands, vineyards, and woods; pleasant corner of the world; peace and plenty*” he wants the reader to envision a quiet, rural, peaceful place, to which he or she will add elements from personal experience. As a consequence, it seems clear that there will always be endless possibilities for the interpretation of a Middle-earth landscape. Again, this is not specific of Tolkien's, but due to the extensive range of places which he describes, and the importance which he gives to them (in the form of maps and geographical coherence in the text), the process of interpretation will be extremely difficult and layered.

When an author decides to create a secondary world, he knows he is venturing into a difficult journey. As we have seen, in order to be successful, the secondary world must be coherent with the rules of that world, invented characters and places must work in a way in which the reader is willingly disposed to suspend disbelief and plunge into a different universe. The places which compose it are studied and structured by the author, almost in the same way an architect studies his projects. Tolkien created the lands of Middle-earth not merely to give his characters a setting; through landscape, he probably also wanted to communicate something more to the reader, he somehow wanted to “change our usual means of perceptions”<sup>5</sup>. As we will see, critics have already identified several messages behind the representation of landscape in *The Lord of the Rings*, but there is still space for other interpretations, as perceived landscapes are potentially endless – in the same way potential readers are. If we put imaginary landscapes at the same level as real,

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5 Crossley, Robert. “Pure and applied Fantasy”. In: Schlobin, Roger C. *The Aesthetics of fantasy literature and art*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame Press, 1982

tangible landscapes, it will be possible to apply the theories about perceived landscapes to Middle-earth too. The definition of “perceived landscape” by R. Muir, widens Meinig's ideas:

In experiencing places, we simultaneously encounter two closely related but different landscapes. The one lying beneath our feet and extending to the far horizon is a *real* landscape; it [...] has objective past and present existences. The other is the *perceived* landscape, consisting of sensed and remembered accounts and hypotheses about the real landscape. It is, therefore, a selective impression of what the real landscape is like. The impression might be very close to reality, or it might contain some important misconceptions. [...] When the one departs, the landscape enduring in the memory to be recalled and recounted will be the one founded on perceptions, not the real landscape. (115)

The “real landscape” in the case of literature is not what we can see with our eyes, but what we can read with them. This is the only difference between the real landscape of the primary world, and the real landscape of the fictional world. They are both composed of objective elements and have objective past and present. This is why it is possible to consider the text as a real landscape. We create the perceived landscape, in both cases, depending on how our brains work with the ideas connected to the real landscape. Already in 1947 J. Wright coined the term “*Terrae Incognitae*” to indicate landscapes of the mind, which shape in our minds when we come across a new place. According to him, “the unknown [meaning an unknown place] stimulates the imagination to conjure up mental images of what to look for within it, and the more there is found, the more the imagination suggests to further research”<sup>6</sup>. Muir states that Wright “was advocating a

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6 Wright, John K. "The Sirens of *Terrae Incognitae*." *TERRAE INCOGNITAE: The Place of the Imagination in Geography*. American Geographical Society, 1991. Web. 3 Oct. 2017. [http://www.colorado.edu/geography/giw/wright-jk/1947\\_ti/1947\\_ti.html](http://www.colorado.edu/geography/giw/wright-jk/1947_ti/1947_ti.html)

'geosophy', a study of geographies of the mind" (118). The study of a geography of the mind, is of fundamental importance in my argument, as I assume the great success behind *The Lord of the Rings* is due in large measure to the particularly vivid images, which the reader creates in his or her mind. Concerning this, Muir noted that: "Novels and other forms of creative writing may be extremely influential in the formation of vernacular images of less familiar landscapes" (125). The growing interest and popularity of *The Lord of the Rings*, suggest that Tolkien's imaginative world has actually succeeded in creating common images, and it has come to be regarded as a 'less familiar landscape', and not merely a fantasy imaginary world. Muir, quoting D.C.D. Pocock, said that the novel offers new aspects on the relationship between people and settings, as in the case of the English regional novel (125). From Pocock's perspective, Middle-earth works as an exotic landscape:

the potency of the literary image in affecting the popular perception of places that would otherwise be little known. [...] The widespread and persistent circulation of the 'message' of particular major works may mean that the literary input to the image of place is high, providing a literary frame of reference with which to approach or view a particular environment. Moreover, given the nature of the environment of the mind, the literary influence may well increase with time, and even persist when contrary evidence is available or refute the traditional image.<sup>7</sup>

Middle-earth is not only constituted by one kind of landscape. After the peaceful countryside of the Shire, the reader sees the mysterious Barrow-downs on a hill, Rivendell – situated on a valley, next to a river, it houses the elves and it is known as "the last

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7 Pocock, D.C.D. 'Place and the novelist' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS 6 (1981) p. 62 in: Muir, Richard. *Approaches to landscape*. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1999. p 126



Homely House East of the Sea”, before venturing in the wilderness of the Misty Mountains. Then the fellowship of the Ring tries to pass the peaks of the Misty Mountains, but on top of one, they are forced to make their way through to the underground city of Moria, dark, airless and dangerous. The reader experiences all these different places – and more, when he/she has not come even to one third of the story. The quest-like pattern, in which the narration is structured, encourages the display of many varieties of landscape. Since it would be too wide a task to apply Muir's theories to each landscape of Middle-earth, I will try to define the landscape of the mind, which originates from one evocative place: the Shire. Among the types of landscape, which have a sort of tradition in evoking specific responses in the spectator, Muir identified the Village. He noted:

Some perceptions of landscape will persist despite mounting evidence of their inaccuracy and redundancy. Countrysides may be imagined to be vibrant with wildlife and birdsong and spangled with wildflowers long after modern industrial farming equipped with pesticides and herbicides have left them sterile and lifeless. In England, the village exists as a potent symbol of qualities of life, which if they ever existed, are lost. [...] The village has developed a mythology which continues to entrance and beguile masses of people. (139)

The mythicized conception of English village fits perfectly the conception which a reader is expected to have when reading about the Shire. From the Prologue to the first book of *The Lord of the Rings*, the reader gets to know that Hobbits are a humble though very ancient people, who prefer a peaceful lifestyle and:

Good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt. They do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom, though they were skilful with tools. (25)

From this description, together with the one previously given, it is easy to picture the Shire exactly as the English rural village, with all its rich connotation. Muir states: “The idyllic village may well be illusory, but this is not to say that it is without influence. It is, in fact, a symbol of durability and great power” (139) Indeed, the reader is deeply influenced by the description of the Shire, it feels natural to be comforted from such a landscape: it is homey and reassuring, and thanks to this, as a consequence, we tend to sympathize with the Hobbits. The innate sense of a land is often referred to as spirit of place. Lawrence Durrell, author of “Spirit of Place” (1969), claims there is an evocative environmental determinism – the idea that environments manifestly influence behaviour and culture. As the geographer Edward Relph pointed out, the idea of spirit of place has echoed through the ages. It derives from an ancient and widespread belief that particular bits of the world are occupied by gods, or spirits who have to be propitiated.<sup>8</sup> Tolkien wanted to convey the sense of a place out of time, untouched by mechanization, and he succeeded: he played with the fascination well-described by Muir. It does not matter if the village landscape is not as idyllic as it is imagined. People feel the need to believe, to be enchanted, especially when reading. Therefore, as Muir noted, what really matters in the present context, is what the village is perceived to be, rather than what it really is:

Despite all the contrary evidence crowding in from the tortured countryside, the village is still widely regarded as a place of rose-decked cottages where comradeship and old-fashioned upright values prevail. In this capacity, the village exists not only as a perception or vision, but also as a powerful symbol  
(141)

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8 Relph, Edward. "Spirit of Place/Genius Loci." PLACENESS PLACE PLACELESSNESS. N.p., 22 Mar. 2015. Web. 07 Sept. 2016.  
<http://www.placeness.com/spirit-of-placegenius-loci/>

The symbolic value of the Shire in the narration is relevant as it lets the reader sympathize with the hobbits. The hardships which they go through during their mission, look even more overwhelming if contrasted with life in the Shire. It is important also as it serves as a counterpoint to the industrial wastelands, which Saruman creates when he lets evil take over him. Juxtaposed to a corrupted, evil, industrial reality, it stands as a model of good.

The perception of the village as an idyllic place is possible only in a context such as modernity, when industrialization has left little – if not any – space for a life perceived in communion with nature. Therefore, the analysis of place is tightly connected to that of time. Perceived landscapes, or landscapes of the mind, depend also on cultural factors. Different cultures are expected to perceive landscape differently, depending on the relationship with their motherland (Muir, 121). Given this, it is also true that the conception of village seems to transcend the limits imposed by culture and time: “In its capacity as a symbol, the English village could look back on around a thousand years of existence” (141).

## 2.1 Pastoralism, or “how do we perceive the Shire?”

The perception of rurality as a symbol of genuine and happy life, clearly owes much to the pastoral tradition. The term “pastoral” is referred to the representation of a bucolic subject where the countryside, shepherds, animals and the landscape are represented in an idealized way. Often, it alludes to idyllic and mythical atmospheres. The pastoral tradition can be traced back to the antiquity; poets such as the Greek Theocritus (*Idylls*), and the Roman Virgil (*Eclogues*) and Ovid (*Metamorphosis*) were to create a paradigm for the pastoral tradition which was imitated during the Renaissance. Edmund Spenser, Alexander Pope, Ben Jonson and even Marlowe and Shakespeare are just some of the many poets who contributed to the pastoral tradition in England. They all depicted the countryside as a beautiful rural idealization to be known as “locus amoenus”, to which the description of the Shire owes a lot<sup>9</sup>. Apart from showing a deep love of the author for a life in communion with nature, the pastoral theme is functional for a message behind the lines. As we will see, the pastoral setting evolves during the narration, almost as much as the characters do. The author looks back to the values and tradition of a previous, mythical age, but this does not represent a pure and simple going back to the past: the tradition has to be invigorated for future challenges, which modern age imposes. This is also the reason why the naturalistic and pastoral themes change, evolve, throughout the story, given the wrong path that the relationship between man and nature has taken. The reader witnesses a progressive upsetting of the equilibrium, which would result in the ultimate domination of man over nature, through the Machine. This is what the dark forces of Sauron – and above all Saruman – represent, and what the modern man has witnessed and has been part of.

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9 More on this in: Ettinger, Andrew V. *Literature and the pastoral*. New Haven: Yale U Press, 1984

Thus, the domain exerted by the Machine is the most tangible symbol of the crumbling of the world as it was before. At an imaginative level, it marks the final turn from the pastoral Eden of “Merrie England” to the urban and industrial present.

In the *Lord of the Rings* it is possible to find two different portraits of the pastoral ideal: apart from the Shire, Lothlórien – the land of the Elves of the forest – is worth a mention. If the Shire represents an idealization of a simple countryside, The description of Lothlórien is almost poetic:

The others cast themselves down upon the fragrant grass, but Frodo stood awhile still lost in wonder. It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured for ever. He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful. In winter here no heart could mourn for summer or for spring. No blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lórien there was no stain. (LotR p. 456)

Even though the Shire and the land of Lórien are surely different in a number of remarkable ways, they appear to have something in common. First of all, a bond between the people and the land. Secondly, a kind of power of both, the place and people, which recalls magic, and which distinguishes them, set them apart from the rest of Middle-earth's peoples and places.<sup>10</sup> This is more evident in the description of the elves and Lórien. Talking about the elves, Sam observes:

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<sup>10</sup> Mitchell, Paul. "Conceptions of the Pastoral in The Fellowship of the Ring." *Dbu.edu*. Web. 21 Jan. 2017. <http://www3.dbu.edu/mitchell/lor1.htm>

Now these folks aren't wanderers or homeless, and seem a bit nearer to the likes of us: they seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say, if you take my meaning. If there's any magic about, it's right down deep, where I can't lay my hands on it, in a manner of speaking... I've never heard of a better land than this. It's like being at home and on the holiday at the same time, if you understand me. (LotR, p. 469)

The Elves and the Hobbits also share a kind of inward-turning attitude that makes them not interested in the things of the world outside theirs, and both are realms protected, but destined to change in the coming world – the Elvish realm will fade away and the Shire will be invaded before order can be restored. Tolkien surely paid a lot of attention to the creation of these places, which idealize a primitive relationship between nature and man.

Despite the fact that it would be wrong to interpret such places as allegories, it is impossible not to relate their meaning to something more. As Tolkien stated:

I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestation, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied *applicability to the thought and experience of readers*. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author. An author cannot of course remain wholly unaffected by his experience, but the ways in which a story-germ uses the soil of experience are extremely complex, and attempts to define the process are at best guesses from evidence that is inadequate and ambiguous. (*my emphasis*, LotR p. XV)

It is thus possible to read a urge for a lost – or even a never existed – lifestyle in the representation of the Shire and Lórien. The perception of landscape is crucial at this point;

in the idealization of landscapes we can read the choice of a specific set of values by the author. The pastoralism, which is possible to find in the aforementioned landscapes, stands for something more: tradition over progress and nature over machine, which ultimately correspond to the triumph of good over evil. We know, thanks to his letters, that Tolkien never hid his dislike for modernity as an age which denaturalises Man. The Industrial Revolution was regarded as a negative event, which changed and upset England almost as the Great War was doing, in an irreversible way: at a “human” level, but also environmentally. The “applicability” of Tolkien's pastoralism to a denounce of his present time, and an exaltation of an idealized life, may sound corny. Actually, it sheds greater importance on Tolkien's landscapes. We must not forget that Tolkien was interested in the creation of an English Mythology, as he was deeply fascinated by Englishness. Muir noted that, according to geographers as Cosgrove, Roscoe and Rycroft (1996), there has recently been an “upsurge of academic interest in Englishness and British national identity, with a variety of writers underlining the crucial role played by landscape representations of the countryside, of pictorial, cartographic or textural natures, in constructing Englishness”<sup>11</sup> Tolkien seems to share such “pro-rural sentiment” (Muir, 231), which was part of the national regeneration of the late nineteenth century England, after the crisis and economic decline. The countryside, P.J Taylor remarks, became viewed as an ideal place where to prosper healthily, hence the myth of the 'authentic state of Merrie England' was born<sup>12</sup>.

If many appreciated Tolkien's idyllic landscapes, the use of pastoralism also exposed him to critics:

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11 Muir, Richard. *Approaches to Landscape*. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1999. p. 230

12 Taylor, P.J. *The English and their Englishness: a curiously elusive and little understood people*. Scottish Geographical Magazine, 1991. p. 146-61. in: Muir, Richard. *Approaches to Landscape*. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1999. p. 231

A major stream of adverse Tolkien criticism can be traced back to Raymond Williams, who, in *The Country and the City* (1985), noted the "extraordinary development of country-based fantasy, from Barrie and Kenneth Grahame through J.C. Powys and T.H. White and now to Tolkien [...] It is then not only that the real land and its people were falsified; a traditional and surviving rural England was scribbled over and almost hidden from sight by what is really a suburban and half-educated scrawl. [...] John Lucas (1990:118), for example: "This is the ultimate, deeply conservative, ambition of pastoral. It falsifies the actual relations of non-city communities just as much and for the same reason that it falsifies city communities." <sup>13</sup>

As a matter of fact, as we have seen, Tolkien's pastoralism is functional to convey other meanings, it stands for a better way of living in contrast to other landscapes which we will see in the next subchapter. Moreover, the exaltation of the countryside in *The Lord of the Rings* has nothing to do with a critique of city communities, which exist in the story only in the ante-tempus prototype of the cities of Men (mainly Minas Tirith and Edoras). Once evil is defeated, such cities will represent the future. The elves will leave Middle-earth and the hobbits will find that their Shire has changed deeply. Therefore, As P. Curry notes:

*The Lord of the Rings* could thus properly be seen as an extended argument that pastoralism as such is *not* enough - doomed, even: "The Shire is not a haven, and the burden of the tale is that there are no havens in a world where evil is a reality. If you think you live in one, you are probably naive like the early Frodo, and certainly vulnerable" (Grant 1981:99). <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Honegger, Thomas, and Patrick Curry. *Root and branch: approaches towards understanding Tolkien*. Zurich: Walking Tree Publishers, 2005. p. 75-139

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 13



## 2.1 Tolkien's Environmental Concerns

The ultimate opposition at the core of *The Lord of the Rings* is evidently between good and evil. If we take a closer look, it is possible to see a more complex conflict: it is an opposition between different attitudes towards life and nature. As was hinted already, while the free peoples – including men, hobbits, elves and dwarves – share a respect for nature and animals, the dark forces of Saruman and Sauron are careless of what surrounds them, and wish to submit the others through war and industrialization. Tolkien is not concerned in depicting nature in a romantic way; on the contrary, the reader perceives it as a living being. Far from being just an object for contemplation, nature becomes a true subject with feelings: Fangorn forest, for example, is explicitly said to have its own emotion and will. Sometimes though – as in the case of the Shire or Lorien – nature is used a symbol. Michael Brisbois noted: “For Tolkien’s novel, nature has a considerable practical value. It is what the Shire’s pastoral culture is based on. The farms and pastures of Middle-earth are described with a keen eye to how they are used in the support of culture.”<sup>15</sup> Even though at different degrees, the Elves, the Hobbits and Tom Bombadil – a nature spirit – show all a total devotion for nature in the form of trees, water and earth. They do not simply live surrounded by nature, they live *in* nature. In fact, their homes are holes inside the earth, or wood constructions on and around trees. Nothing artificial is needed, nature is vital to them and they serve nature in return, as caretakers and loving keepers, at the point that trees are even said to sing for the Elves. It is not a surprise that, among the free peoples the one which shows the least empathy towards nature is Man. But even so, men are never disrespectful or destructive for what surrounds them. However, it is

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15 Brisbois, Michael J. *Where the shadows lie nature, modernity and the audience of Middle-earth*. Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada = Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 2006. p. 39

implied that a deeper communion with nature would be possible and desirable. Sauron, who represents pure evil, lives in the Mordor region where nothing grows. Air is polluted, there is neither water source, nor green, and fire is the predominant element. It is clear that this environment is antithetical to the “Green World”<sup>16</sup> of the rest of Middle-earth. As David Harvey has noted already:

Growing things, the fruits of the earth, the seasonal cycles of nature are so often used to represent purity or a world unsullied. Juxtaposed against this image is that of the Pits of Utumno, the bleakness of Thangorodrim, the desert of Mordor, the industrial wasteland of Saruman's Isengard and the blighted Shire of Sharkey and Wormtongue.<sup>17</sup>

Technology represents the inevitable means through which it is possible to reach power, thus it is evil and in contrast with nature. This is why in the end, Fangorn forest reacts and revolts against Saruman, ultimately triumphing. Trees become the synecdoche for Nature, which can rebel against its enemy with a destructive power, if attacked or spoilt.

In the comparison between good and evil, it is also possible to notice a different attitude towards animals. Considering men, the Rohirrim are a culture based on horses, which are true companions of life. Horses are praised as if they were mythological creatures. Concerning this, Harvey noted:

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16 Term coined by Northrop Frye in: Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of criticism*. London: Penguin, 2002. p. 182-4

17 Harvey, David. *The song of Middle-earth: J.R.R. Tolkien's themes, symbols and myths*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1985. p. 105

The Mearas of Rohan were descendants of Felaróf, the horse of Eorl, whom Eorl rode without bit or bridle and who understood all that men said [...] The Mearas became the horses of the Kings of Rohan and none other could ride them. [...] The ability of the King to mount and ride this unique type of horse in a culture that is so very horse-oriented must be symbolic of his ability to rule. (107)

Sam loves his pony Billie deeply, and Gandalf also appears to respect, admire and care about his legendary horse Shadowfax. Moreover, when he is imprisoned in Isengard, Gandalf is saved by the eagles in the same way Frodo and Sam will later be; the eagles are thus given the function of helpers. The dark forces, on the other hand, appear to claim more of a dominion over other lives. Orcs and Uruk-hai are not generated naturally, Saruman is said to breed them, and:

Worse than that: he has been doing something to them; something dangerous. For these Isengarders are more like wicked Men. It is a mark of evil things that came in the Great Darkness that they cannot abide the Sun; but Saruman's Orcs can endure it, even if they hate it. I wonder what he has done? Are they Men he has ruined, or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be a black evil! (LotR, 616)

Saruman is perpetrating an act against nature, which is the worst thing that can be done. The conception of life and how to live is completely different for the free folk and Mordor. Mordor and Isengard are organized in a militaristic way, and their purpose is supremacy. They wish to destroy the cultures of Middle-earth, imposing a singular way of life over them, which would have all peoples enslaved. The work of evil forces in the novel can be interpreted in many ways, but one is surely as the coming of industry in the real world. The Industrial Revolution which happened between 1760 and 1830 in England, notably brought radical changes in the society, in particular regarding social classes, life habits, and

landscape. If the revolution for sure represented progress and improvement, on the other hand there were many negative aspects which made an impression on Tolkien. One of the first consequences of the revolution, was the shift of great masses of people from the countryside to the city, where new factories were built. Air became polluted, and block-houses were built in order to host the increasing number of people migrating to the city. Those who worked in factories were no longer artisans and craftsmen, but became workers employed with machines. New roads and railways were built in the country, changing the landscape consistently. Work and life conditions were appalling, men – women and children too – were forced to work for too many hours, in bitter conditions. Time acquired a different meaning. It was given an economic value: thus we may talk about a de-naturalization of time, which was inevitably reflected on men. Writers like Zola and Dickens denounced this system, but no one could stop progress and the pace of change. At that point of history, human beings surely changed. People became something different.<sup>18</sup> Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* more than a hundred years after the Industrial Revolution, but the previous generation still remembered the pre-industrial world. Since he was not involved in the process of change, he was able to see things at full scale, retrospectively. What Tolkien regretted, is that mankind used to be tied to earth, to animals, to water power and wind. Man was in harmony with nature and the passing of seasons; then machines and man's artefacts took the place of nature, which became a tool to be exploited. Tolkien's narration is pervaded by a sense of unredeemable loss of such a life. As Kleinman noted, the English countryside had been largely transformed by the time of Tolkien's birth in 1892, and, although it was still possible in places to experience England as it had once been, these places were rapidly disappearing. Tolkien for sure

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<sup>18</sup> More on this in: Webb, Igor. *From custom to capital: the English novel and the Industrial Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 1981. p. 162-213

resented the effect of industrialism on the countryside and on its traditional way of life. As a consequence, it is possible to say that the culture of the Shire is evocative of the pre-industrial England<sup>19</sup>. The Green World of the free folk juxtaposed to the iron wasteland of Sauron and Saruman, not only represents a comparison between good principles and corruption, fertile countryside and hostile urban landscape, it is also a conflict between a natural lifestyle and an artificial one, between man and the machine. Tolkien's dislike of the effect of industrialisation on the English landscape, and his concern about industrial wastelands is particularly worthy of note, as it can be regarded even as a sort of ecological interest ante-tempus. The modern trend for ecological and biological goods has been growing in developed countries in recent years. In some cases, the great reason behind such an interest is to be reconnected to nostalgic feelings for a harmony with our planet, more than to a concrete environmental awareness. The environmental concern and nostalgia for a more primitive, ancient world, are deeply connected in Tolkien's work. There is an essential dualism between antiquity and nature; in fact, these two key concepts are unfailingly powerful and positive. One of the best example is the forest of Lothlórien:

[...] it seemed to him [Frodo] that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more. In Rivendell there was memory of ancient things; in Lórien the ancient things still lived on in the waking world. [...] All he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured forever. He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful... Frodo felt that he was in a timeless land that did not fade or change or fall into forgetfulness. (LotR, 454-456)

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19 Kleinman, S. "The Lord of the Rings Industrialism." *The Lord of the Rings by J.R.R Tolkien*. Daniel Roth, 31 May 2005. Web. 21 Feb. 2017.  
<http://www.csun.edu/~dar04956/literature/lordoftherings/industrial.html>

From natural and old elements, the heroes of the story take strength, knowledge and even magic, and in this way they are able to overcome the enemy.

In the story, it is clear that the time of the elves on earth is coming to an end. The victory of the free folk represents the advent of the Age of Men. The elves lament having to depart from their beloved earth, and in particular from their trees, the *Mellyrn*. The elvish people represents the ideal anti-industrial society, but being doomed to depart for Valinor, it is implied that such a society can exist no more. It is a nostalgic loss which connects them with Treebeard's loss of part of Fangorn forest, and the hobbits' grief when they finally go back home, and see what has happened to their Shire. Differently from the elves though, the time of the trees in the world has not come to an end. Therefore, the Ents revolt against Saruman's industrial wasteland and succeed. In the same way, the hobbits fight for their home and re-establish the natural order. Tolkien may be suggesting that Nature can revolt and win against its oppressors. In this sense, *The Lord of the Rings* conveys, among the others, also the message for humanity to cherish and respect Nature. A concept which has never been as actual as nowadays. Andrew Light (New York University) in a prepublication to *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy* says:

Isn't the entire series about the environment, or nature, and aren't all the characters in the novel representations of some part of nature? Scholars such as Patrick Curry (1997) have argued that Tolkien's works are thoroughly infused with a strong environmentalist message. Curry goes so far as to claim that *The Lord of the Rings* served as a kind of clandestine environmental manifesto that was later most appreciated during the rise of the radical environmental movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>20</sup>

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20 Light, Andrew. "Tolkien's Green Time: Environmental Themes in The Lord of the Rings." *Metaphilm*. 23 July 2003. Web. 21 Apr. 2016.

In the chapter “The Scouring of the Shire”, the reader accompanies the hobbits back to their land and assists as they found their beloved homeland has been ravaged in their absence, becoming a den for brigands and an ecological disaster. This branch of the primary story proves how much the hobbits have grown up. They have to fight without any external help, in order to regain their home back; even when life order will be restored, they will not be able to go back to their original state of blissful ignorance. When the fellowship had to leave Lothlórien, Galadriel gave Sam a gift, which consisted of a small box “of plain grey wood, unadorned save for a single silver rune upon the lid” (LotR, 489), containing grey dust and a seed which is later revealed to be a Mallorn, the Elvish tree. Galadriel’s gift, a gift of earth from the land of Lórien, is meant to be a present which not only will heal the Shire, but will help to heal the hearts of the Hobbit people. The seed of the Mallorn stands for new life and hope, again, nature plays a major role in the narration. The natural disaster caused by the new regime in the Shire is what shocks the hobbits most. Their pastoral, idyllic land has been infringed by evil forces:

Many of the houses that the hobbits had known were missing. Some seemed to have been burned down. The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the bank of the north side of the Poll were deserted, and their little gardens that used to run down bright to the water’s edge were rank with weeds. There was a whole line of the ugly new houses all along Pool Side, where the Hobbiton Road ran close to the bank, where an avenue of trees used to stand. They were all gone. And looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End the hobbits saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening air. (LotR, 1314)

Evil has invaded every the Shire, and once more it has taken the form of an environmental

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[http://metaphilm.com/index.php/detail/tolkiens\\_green\\_time/](http://metaphilm.com/index.php/detail/tolkiens_green_time/)

decline. As Sam remarks: “ ‘This is worse than Mordor!’ [...] ‘Much worse in a way. It comes home to you all, as they say; because it is home, and you remember it before it was all ruined.’ ” (1332). Symbols of a rustic and simple life, such as the old mill, have been replaced by “a great brick building straddling the stream, which it fouled with a steaming and stinking outflow” (1330). Machines and industry have overcome the countryside life, as much as corruption has bribed the hearts of some of the hobbits who stayed. Thanks to their new confidence and skills, the hobbits are able to gain back the Shire and triumphs over their usurpers. The wound which their land suffered though, will take many years to heal. Much has been said and argued about the profound meaning or message behind the chapter the “Scouring of the Shire”. Since it seems not to have any particular relevance for the rest of the story plot, one may argue Tolkien has decided to make it part of his work for some specific reason. It can be applicable of the situation in which humanity already was when Tolkien was writing: a situation of ecological emergency for our planet, which is exploited more and more and which leads ultimately to evil. Mathews noted this already: “The story of the Rings [...] is in one sense a fable of how advanced technology and craft produce artefacts of great power and temptation but induce theft and war”.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it is important to give the right emphasis to the environmental message behind the novel, despite no specific reference was intended by the author. As Light said: “Tolkien helps us understand the importance of nature as the foreground and background of all events of any significance to us, while at the same time encouraging our responsibility for it.”<sup>22</sup>

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21 Mathews, Richard. *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. New York: Twayne, 1997.

p. 63

22 Ibid. 20



## 2.3 On the importance of the tree

Life, death and rebirth are all aspects of the symbolism which concerns the tree and are united in much mythological tradition as Della Hooke noted in her work *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England*. She remarks that the symbolism of trees is complex: their roots and branches evoke an image of a link between the sky and the underworld; their longevity represents continuity and wisdom. Since Antiquity, the seasonal behaviour of deciduous trees has given rise to a cyclical symbolism and allegory of life, death and rebirth.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most recurrent symbol in Tolkien's legendarium, the tree is present on multiple levels in *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as in all the other works by the author. As Claudia R. Finseth has noted:

In his writings J.R.R. Tolkien gives us all kinds of forests and groves in which to find adventure – and he does more. He ascribes to his individual trees and forests a fantastic variety of meanings and possibilities by drawing from and adding to the rich symbolism of trees that has developed throughout the history of literature. Tolkien describes the trees with which we are familiar – oak, birch, willow – so that we see them with a fresh eye. He creates new trees for us such as we have never seen growing on our earth. He gives us a chance to look at things from a treeish point of view, which is to say, a fresh point of view, and from there he can give an added dimension to his human characters, who define themselves in part through their attitudes towards trees.<sup>24</sup>

Finseth remarks that Tolkienian characters are more than often defined as good or evil by their attitude towards trees. In fact – as we have seen in the previous subchapter – many of

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23 Hooke, Della. *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England: literature, lore and landscape*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2010. p. 3

24 Finseth, R. Claudia, , "Essay: Tolkien's Trees." *Hobbit Movie News and Rumors | TheOneRing.net*<sup>TM</sup>. 21 Oct. 2008. Web. 24 Jan. 2017.  
<http://www.theonering.net/torwp/2008/11/03/30350-essay-tolkiens-trees/>

the evil characters of Middle-earth are tree-destroyers. In contrast, in the good faction there are many tree-lovers. Humphrey Carpenter remarked that since childhood, Tolkien's life was filled with the rich symbolism of the great trees of literature. Those stories which "awakened desire" in him included "above all, forests."<sup>25</sup> Also, Finseth notes that Tolkien's strong Catholic faith, made him acquainted with Christ's metaphor of the vine and the branches, and possibly he knew the stories about the tree that became cross. The story of Medieval literature increased his knowledge of the tree symbolism, including the cross-tree in the Anglo Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*, and the Poetic *Edda* of Norse mythology with its World Tree, Yggdrasil – from which the god Odin was thought to have hung in voluntarily to acquire hidden knowledge and wisdom<sup>26</sup>. From the *Silmarillion*, we know Tolkien's legendarium was created originally from the two trees of Valinor, Telperion and Laurelin – the Silver Tree and the Gold. They brought light to the Land of the Valar, the primordial elves, in ancient times. The two trees were destroyed by evil, but their last flower and fruit were made by the elves into the Moon and the Sun.<sup>27</sup> The tree is a symbol which has definite biblical references: In *Genesis* (2:9), the Lord "caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Tolkien's work has many times been interpreted as a fundamentally religious and Catholic work. And indeed, there are many references which appear to confirm, that he might have been influenced or inspired by biblical myths. For instance, in the *Deuteronomy* (20:19-20), it is said:

When you besiege a city a long time, to make war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them; for you may eat

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25 Carpenter, Humphrey. *J.R.R. Tolkien: a biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977. p. 24

26 Ibid. 24

27 "Two Trees of Valinor - Tolkien Gateway." *Two Trees of Valinor* - Tolkien Gateway. Web. 27 Jan. 2017 [http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Two\\_Trees\\_of\\_Valinor](http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Two_Trees_of_Valinor)

from them, and you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you?

Such a warning is reflected in some episodes of *The Lord of the Rings*: for instance, the Old Forest eventually revolts against evil, as Saruman burns the trees and uses their wood for his evil purposes; he is ultimately committing an act against good, against god perhaps. Even though there is no reference to a religion whatsoever in the story, the divine natural law manages to take its revenge. As Tolkien explained:

*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically any references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed in the story and the symbolism (Letters, 172);

The creation of the world connected to the Two Trees, evokes the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of the garden of Eden. It is therefore possible to argue that there are some biblical echoes or inspirations behind such an extensive use of the figure of the tree. Therefore, Tolkien's love and respect for trees, as well as his interest in making them a crucial symbol in his narrations, was nurtured by a rich literary tradition. The figure of the tree perfectly suits Tolkien's will to merge the sacred – in the form of biblical and Catholic references – and the profane Nordic spirit, that is, the Anglo-saxon and Norse tradition, in a deeply “tree-oriented” narration.

Mathews noted how trees, rather than burrows or caves, are particularly in evidence early in the “Fellowship of the Ring”: “Frodo hides inside a hollow tree at the start of his journey, and as the company enters the Old Forest, Merry and Pippin are trapped inside a

willow tree”<sup>28</sup>. Indeed, the first reference to the tree as a symbol in *The Lord of the Rings* is the one concerning Old Man Willow Tree. The four hobbits have just started their journey, when they have to pass through the Old Forest. The reader is told it is a queer and unwelcoming place, where “everything is very much more alive than in the Shire” (LotR, 110). Trees there are said to move and whisper to each other in an unintelligible language: they are given supernatural powers and anthropomorphic characteristics. The Old Forest has a reason for behaving with hostility towards strangers: a long time before, the Hobbits had made a great bonfire with the trees which had planted themselves right by the Hedge. Tolkien once stated that he always sided with the forest, even against his own creatures, the Hobbits: “In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies [...] the Old Forest was hostile because of the memory of many injuries” (Letters, 419). When the company of four hobbits tries to pass through the forest, the trees seem to bar any possible path, making it very hard for them to find a way through. At a certain point, the hobbits suddenly feel extremely sleepy: it is the power of the willow, which has cast a spell on them. Afterwards, the tree traps Merry and Pippin, and only Tom Bombadil will be able to save them. Even though the willow tree is said to have an evil spirit, it does not seem to represent nature's wickedness. It stands for the possibility of revolt which nature possesses, if it is violated. It also shows that trees have feelings, emotions and will. This will be further developed in the narration, when the entire Fangorn forest will revolt. Completely The White Tree of Minas Anor (also known as Minas Tirith) appears to be different from Old Man Willow. Before the Fellowship is created, the elf Elrond tells the story of Men and their decline – which led to the proliferation of dark and evil things. The seed of the White Tree came “from the the seed of that tree which Isildur brought over the deep

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28 Mathews, Richard. *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. New York: Twayne, 1997. p. 68

waters, and the seed of that tree before came from Eressëa, and before that out of the Uttermost West in the Day before days when the world was young.” (LotR, 244). If the Willow belongs to a present time and to a place which is near the Shire, the White Tree has its roots in a distant past; the tone and style of the narration are higher when references to the White Tree are made, so that the reader perceives it as a more eminent figure than other trees. The White Tree's dynasty parallels the royal one of Men: as the line of the Númenóreans mingled with those of “lesser men”, the tree has withered. By the end of the story, the White Tree of Gondor comes to symbolize the end of a life cycle and the beginning of a new one, it is a bond between past and present. When King Aragorn, after the good has triumphed, questions Gandalf about the destiny of his reign, the wizard shows him a sapling tree that grows in the waste and snow, on the battlefield. It is “a sapling of the line of Nimloth the fair [...] a seedling of the Eldest of Trees. Who shall say how it comes here in the appointed hour?” (LotR, 971). Soon after, the sapling is planted instead of the withered White Tree, which is gently uprooted. Standing for a new beginning and a restored equilibrium, the new tree is said to have grown and blossomed (LotR, 974). In the same way, the legitimate dynasty of Men prospered.

Saruman's desolation of the Shire is exemplified in the felling of the Party Tree, which, at the time the hobbits went back, was “lying lopped and dead in the field. As if this was the last straw Sam burst into tears” (LotR, 1017). Among all the terrible destructions to the environment, trees are said to be “the worst loss and damage”, they had been “cut down recklessly far and wide over the Shire” (LotR, 1022). Nevertheless, it is a wound which does not need too much time to heal: Sam planted saplings “in all the places where specially beautiful or beloved trees had been destroyed” (LotR, 1023). Trees grow and flourish faster that year, and in the same way as the White Tree of Gondor, the Party Tree

is replaced by the precious seed of Mallorn, which Galadriel gave to Sam when in Lórien. By springtime, a beautiful new sapling with silver bark, long leaves and golden flowers leaped up, and “in after years, as it grew in grace and beauty, it was known far and wide and people would come long journeys to see it: the only *mallorn* west of the Mountains and east of the Sea [...]” (LotR, 1023). As in the case of the White Tree, the tree symbolizes the rebirth, prosperity and the restoration to a state of peace and plenty.

The category of trees is described yet in another way, that is the beautiful and verdant Golden Wood, where the land of Lórien is located. Lothlórien is the reign of the Galahdrim – the Tree-people (LotR, 341), of whom Galadriel and Celeborn are queen and king. Tolkien stated “Lothlórien is beautiful because there the trees were loved; elsewhere forests are represented as awakening to consciousness of themselves.” (Letters, 419) The Mellyrn, imaginative trees which constitute the Golden Wood, represent nature in the sense of protective mother and refuge<sup>29</sup>. Mellyrn are described as precious trees; their predominant colours are silver and gold: “the floor of the wood is golden, and golden is the roof, and its pillars are of silver, for the bark of the trees is smooth and grey” (LotR, 335). Their leaves are green on top and silver underneath; they turn gold in autumn and do not fall through the winter. Only in the spring, old leaves fall when new leaves sprout. The trunk of the tree divides to a crown of different branches, and the elves use the space on the top to build platforms, used as shelters. The entire Lothlórien is built in the branches of huge mellyrn.<sup>30</sup> In Lothlórien Frodo experiences the presence of life in trees as never before:

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29 Ibid. 27

30 More on this in: Tolkien, J. R. R., and Christopher Tolkien. *Unfinished tales: of Númenor and Middle-earth*. London: HarperCollins, 2010. “A Description of the Island of Númenor”.

As Frodo prepared to follow him, he laid his hand upon the tree beside the ladder: never before had he been so suddenly and keenly aware of the feel and texture of a tree's skin and of the life within it. He felt delight in wood and the touch of it, neither as forester nor as carpenter; it was the delight of the living tree itself. (LotR, 351)

The trees of the Golden Wood have a protective function, they represent not only the elves' refuge and safety, but home and comfort as well. Mallyrn also provide refuge and protection to Frodo and the Fellowship of the Ring, on the night when they finally get out of the dark and dangerous mines of Moria.<sup>31</sup> The society of Lothlórien is perceived as an ideal place. The communion between nature and elves is total: the spirits of the trees and those of the elves are equal – in the sense that they are given the same degree of importance – and communicate with each other. Trees are described almost like divine presences, and the equilibrium of all elements is so perfect that it is perceived as if it belonged to an undetermined ancient time, where no trace of evil could persist:

In Rivendell there was memory of ancient things; in Lórien the ancient things still lived on in the waking world. Evil had been seen and heard there, sorrow had been known; the Elves feared and distrusted the world outside: wolves were howling on the wood's borders: but on the land of Lórien no shadow lay. (LotR, 349)

Lórien's description recalls the tradition of the *locus amoenus*; what is peculiar, is that the most highlighted part of the environment are the trees. The place is described through the eyes of the hobbits, particularly Frodo and Sam. The hobbits say that they feel like in a “vanished world” and “as if [...] inside a song” (LotR, 350-1). Lorien's land possesses such a powerful, divine magic that it is sensed as if it was unreal to the members of the

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31 Ibid. 24

Fellowship. Indeed, such a place is doomed to disappear from Middle-earth, even when peace is restored. It is not by chance though, that Galadriel gives Sam a seed of Mallorn, so that the spirit which resides in the tree can endure, and the memory of elves and Lothlórien shall survive.

Unlike the Golden Forest, the forest of Fangorn, recalls Old Willow in its darkness, gloom and danger. At this point in the narration, the Fellowship has already dissolved. Merry and Pippin have been captured by some orcs, but while they are being taken to Saruman's, they are able to escape and find shelter in Fangorn. Differently from the Old Forest, it is stillness and neglect which most oppress the hobbits:

'it is all very dim, and stuffy, in here [...] It reminds me, somehow, of the old room in the Great Palace of the Tooks: a huge place, where the furniture has never been moved or changed for generations [...] that is nothing to the old feeling of this wood. Look at all those weeping, trailing, beards and whiskers of lichen! And most of the trees seem to be half covered with ragged dry leaves that have never fallen. Untidy. I can't imagine how spring would look like here, if it ever comes; still less a spring-cleaning. [...] This is just dim and frightfully tree-ish.' (LotR, 461)

It is at this point of the story, that from a natural element the tree becomes a crucial character in the story, through the figure of Treebeard, the chief Ent. He is also named Fangorn, from whom the forest has taken its name. His description is one of the most accurate in the story. He is described as:

a large Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure, at least fourteen foot high, very sturdy, with a tall head, and hardly any neck. Whether it was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or whether that was its hide, was difficult to say. At any rate the arms, at a short distance from the trunk, were not wrinkled, but covered with a brown smooth skin. The large feet had seven toes each. The lower part of the long face was covered with a sweeping grey beard, bushy, almost twiggy at the



roots, thin and mossy at the ends. But at the moment the hobbits noted little but the eyes. These deep eyes were now surveying them, slow and solemn, but very penetrating. They were brown, shot with a green light. (LotR, 463)

Ents or Onodrim, Treebeard explains, are tree-herds and they are one of the most ancient peoples in Middle-earth. They go across the ages as guardians and protectors of trees. Ents are decreasing as lately many have turned “tree-ish”, that is they grew sleepy, and they became trees. They are characterized by long-pondering and reflection; as they are not concerned with the events which happen around them, they do not usually take sides in other peoples' battles. In this sense, Ents personify Nature itself. Despite this, Treebeard will lead the revolt of the Fangorn forest against Saruman. What the evil forces are doing, is not simply a battle against the free-folk: Saruman is destroying the Old Forest, thus making this the battle of the trees too. Concerning this, Finseth noted:

Entish abhorrence of hastiness; the slow, steady, [...] deliberation of the Entmoot; even the deep, melodic “Hrum, hoom” of Treebeard, all embody the antithesis of modern society with its emphasis on speed and mass production—things that troubled Tolkien. [...] Contrary to modern society, Tolkien did not equate slowness with ineffectiveness, nor technology with wisdom or moral superiority. In a paradoxical twist that illuminates the tragedy of our own machine age, Tolkien makes modern man seem strangely immobile and impotent compared with the Ents once they have made a decision to act.<sup>32</sup>

Treebeard's revolt accomplishes what the Old Willow had tried to do at the beginning of the story, that is Nature's insurgence against who is not able to treat it in the right way. D. Harvey remarks that the Willow, in the same way as the Ents, represents the slow patience

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32 Finseth, R. Claudia. "Essay: Tolkien's Trees." *Hobbit Movie News and Rumors* | *TheOneRing.net*<sup>TM</sup>. 21 Oct. 2008. Web. 24 Jan. 2017.  
<http://www.theonering.net/torwp/2008/11/03/30350-essay-tolkiens-trees/>

of trees and their enormous, almost god-like power; unlike the Ents though, the Willow does not have the faculty to move or communicate (Harvey, 111). Moreover, while the Ents succeed in their revolt, Old Willow's blind fury is stopped by the spirit of Nature itself. The author decides to give the trees the ability to actively defend themselves, something that they do not possess in real life. Therefore, this could represent an exhortation for Man to help and preserve trees and Nature, for in our Primary World they are almost totally defenseless.

### **2.3.1 The Forest and its symbolic meaning**

Though clearly connected tightly to trees, the symbolic value of the forest has a different literary tradition. In his book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning And Importance of Fairy Tales*, Bruno Bettelheim explores the significance of the forest in fairy-tales. He writes:

Since ancient times the near impenetrable forest in which we get lost has symbolized the dark, hidden, near-impenetrable world of our unconscious. If we have lost the framework which gave structure to our past life and must now find our way to become ourselves, and have entered this wilderness with an as yet undeveloped personality, when we succeed in finding our way out we shall emerge with a much more highly developed humanity.<sup>33</sup>

Forests are a recurrent setting, especially in most fairy-tales and children's literature, folktales and fantasy stories: from Perrault's *Red Riding Hood* (1697), to G.S. Barbot de Villeneuve's *The Beauty and the Beast* (1740), from the Fairy-tales by the Grimms (1812),

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<sup>33</sup> Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Vintage, 1977. p. 94

to Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), and from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) by Tolkien's friend C.S. Lewis, to J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), the list – across the centuries until present times – would be almost endless. Such an interest on a specific environment must have a reason. Writer J. Gaunt, points at the father of psychic exploration C. Jung, who maintains that sinister figures and shadows, which so frequently dwells in enchanted forests, symbolize the perilous aspects of the unconscious: its tendency to devour or obscure reason.<sup>34</sup> In the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, in order to explain the notion of Jungian archetype, the forest is taken as an example:

In fairy tales an unlikely protagonist must usually journey beyond the familiar world into the realm of the unfamiliar. Often the unfamiliar is depicted as a forest, subterranean, or marine environment. Such imagery indicates an encounter with the collective unconscious, as these regions are hidden from the light of consciousness and civilization; instead, these darker areas team with fauna, whose behaviour is tied to instinct. Beings that emerge from the trees and the depths, the instinctual realm of the collective unconscious, are culturally specific manifestations of the archetypes.<sup>35</sup>

The symbolic value of forests in *The Lord of the Rings* seems to be the same as in fairytales and folktales; indeed, in the story it is common for characters who venture into the woods, to experience a sense of disorientation and insecurity. The journey in the intricate forest represents a challenge and a chance to grow, it is never easy to find a way out, and the character who manages to get out is never the same who has entered. The hobbits in

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34 Gaunt, Justine. “The Fairytale Forest – a Source of Symbolism” *The Fairytale Forest – a Source of Symbolism* | *Woodlands.co.uk*. N.p., 2011. Web. 29 Jan. 2017.

<http://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/flora-and-fauna/the-fairytale-forest-a-source-of-symbolism>

35 Seth, R. and C. Knox in: Haase, Donald. *The Greenwood encyclopedia of folktales and fairy tales*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008. p. 65

particular, when in the Old Forest or in Fangorn, may remind the reader of a naïve Snow White or Little Red Riding Hood. Yet, even if oppressed by difficulties, they are able to overcome the obstacles and undergo a process of personal development, which prepares them for future challenges. Gaunt quotes J.C Cooper, who in *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia Of Traditional Symbols*, writes:

Entering the Dark Forest or the Enchanted Forest is a threshold symbol: the soul entering the perils of the unknown; the realm of death; the secrets of nature, or the spiritual world which man must penetrate to find the meaning.<sup>36</sup>

Sometimes though, Gaunt remarks, the forest is perceived as “a hiding place, a sanctuary” in stories such as the Robin Hood cycle, or the Hindu love story of Rama and Sita<sup>37</sup>. Indeed, the forest can symbolize refuge too. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Merry and Pippin enter Fangorn Forest because they are running away from orcs. The forest actually hides them. Despite their initial reluctance, it is here that they meet Treebeard and learn important lessons. The idea of the two hobbits' personal growth is further reinforced by their increased height. Treebeard gives them the Ent-draught, that is:

like water [...] and yet there was some scent or savour in it which they could not describe; it was faint, but it reminded them of the smell of a distant wood borne from afar by a cool breeze at night. The effect of the draught began at the toes, and rose steadily through every limb, bringing refreshment and vigour as it coursed upwards, right to the tips of the hair. (LotR, 471)

The Ent-draught is said to have added three inches or more to their heights, making them

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36 Cooper, J. C. *An illustrated encyclopaedia of traditional symbols*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1978. in: Gaunt, Justine. “The Fairytale Forest – a Source of Symbolism” *The Fairytale Forest – a Source of Symbolism | Woodlands.co.uk*. N.p., 2011. Web. 29 Jan. 2017. <http://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/flora-and-fauna/the-fairytale-forest-a-source-of-symbolism>

37 Ibid. 34

the tallest Hobbits in the history of the Shire. The new courage and knowledge which the hobbits acquire in the forest, will prove essential in their “final test”, that is regaining the Shire. K. Zahorski and R. Boyer state that there is an ambivalence in the realm of Faërie: “forests [...] can be places of response and retreat, but if one is not wary or does not act in the proper fashion, forests can be frightening realms.”<sup>38</sup>

There seems to be a psychological explanation, other than the archetype one offered by Jung, for the success of symbolic landscapes such as forests. Environmental psychologists S. and R. Kaplan have studied the factors which influence our preferences for one kind of landscape over another. According to them, the most appealing landscapes are those which bear elements of “mystery” and “involvement”; in these places, more information is promised than is actually revealed<sup>39</sup>. The forest surely meets the criteria, and it is therefore entitled to charm a wide range of readers.

### 2.3.2 Tolkien's *Leaf by Niggle*

Trees influenced Tolkien also at the level of how literary production, or “sub-creation”, operates. In the same period in which *The Lord of the Rings* was – as the author said: “beginning to unroll itself” (1938-9), Tolkien also wrote the short story *Leaf by Niggle*. It was published together with *On Fairy-Stories* in the book *Tree and Leaf* (1964). In the 'Introductory Note' to the original edition of *Tree and Leaf*, he explains that the story of Niggle originated from an event of his personal life:

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38 Zahorski, Kenneth and Robert Boyer. “The Secondary Worlds of High Fantasy”. In: Schlobin, Roger C. *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame, 1982. p. 60

39 Kaplan, S. and R. Kaplan. *Humanscape: Environments for People*. Belmont, California: Duxbury, 1978. in: Muir, Richard. *Approaches to Landscape*. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1999. p. 256

a great-limbed poplar tree that I could see even lying in bed, [...] was suddenly lopped and mutilated by its owner, I do not know why. It is cut down now, a less barbarous punishment for any crimes it may have been accused of, such as being large and alive.<sup>40</sup>

The story plot is about a little man called Niggle who: “had a long journey to make. He did not want to go [...] but he could not get out of it” (Tree and Leaf, 93). If the beginning evokes that of *the Hobbit* (1937) a lot, the narration then takes a completely different direction. Niggle is a painter who “had a number of pictures on hand; most of them were too large and ambitious for his skill. He was the sort of painter who can paint leaves better than trees [...] yet he wanted to paint a whole tree [...]” (94). One day Niggle starts to paint a tree, and after a while it becomes the only painting he is interested in. The painting grows and takes up all time from the painter, but it seemed never to be finished. On an Autumn day, Niggle is forced to go to the doctor in order to help Mr. Parish, the lame gardener who is Niggle's neighbour. In the process of helping him, Niggle catches a chill, which forces him in bed for more than a week. The very day of his recovery, just as he is starting to work on his tree again, he finds out it is the day of his journey and he is compelled to leave. Since he is not prepared for it, he faints and ends up hospitalized in the Workhouse Infirmary, where he must work hard every day. After what Niggle perceives as a very long time, he is given the “Gentle Treatment”, and he is sent to the “next stage”. He then finds himself in the landscape of his painting, and the Great Tree, which “was finished, though not finished with” (111) looks much better than the painted one, it is “a gift”, the most beautiful. Niggle realizes that he needs Parish, for help and advice. And indeed, after a while Parish arrives, and together they live and take care of the place, which becomes even more beautiful. Finally, Niggle feels he has to travel further, to the far

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40 Tolkien, J.R.R. *Tree and Leaf*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2001. p. vi

reaches of the forest towards the mountains, to places on the fringe of his canvas.

Tolkien explained in his letters that Niggle is intended to be more of a real person, rather than an allegorical representation. His story is “part apologia and part confession”<sup>41</sup>. Nonetheless, despite Tolkien's denial, the short story *Leaf by Niggle* is deeply allegorical. Niggle's paintings represent Tolkien's literary production and art; the Tree – the most important of all Niggle's works – is evocative of *The Lord of the Rings*, as Niggle states of his painting: “it had begun with a leaf caught in the wind, and it became a tree; and the tree grew, sending out innumerable branches, and thrusting out the most fantastic roots” (94). In the same way Tolkien, in the foreword of *Lord of the Rings*, writes: “the story has roots in the past, and threw out unexpected branches”. Concerning this, M. Sammons noted:

*Leaf by Niggle* also was inspired by Tolkien's preoccupation with *The Lord of the Rings*, a story he wanted to write [...] using a “large canvas”. It describes anxiety about his own “internal Tree” that he wanted to finish but feared he would never complete. It kept growing out of hand by revealing “endless new vistas”. He compares his own method of writing as a “branching acquisitive theme”.<sup>42</sup>

And indeed, he states that all stories ever written are but “intricately knotted and ramified [...] branches on the Tree of Tales”<sup>43</sup>. The tree acquires several meanings: it is a multi-layered symbol, applicable to *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as to Tolkien's mythology of Middle-earth as a whole, and even to the entirety of all stories in the world. As Niggle complains that his art was not valued enough and because he was always distracted while working, in the same way, Tolkien's colleagues considered his work “trivial literature”, and he lamented that his university job interfered with serious work<sup>44</sup>. The mysterious journey

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41 Sammons, Martha C. *War of the Fantasy Worlds: C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien on Art and Imagination*. Santa Barbara, CA.: Praeger, 2010. p. 86

42 Ibid. 41 p. 88

43 Ibid. 40 p. 19

44 Ibid. 41 p. 87

which Niggle has to undertake, might be allegorical for life and its difficulties, which – after they are overcome – enable us to gain new knowledge. It is also a purgatory and a reward journey, which leads to the realisation of art and a new perspective on life.

Finseth remarks that in his love for trees, Tolkien contributed to the wisdom of the wise:

Like wizards, [...] who “believe that the wise man is one who never sets himself apart from other living things, whether they have speech or not” and “learn what can be learned, in silence, from the eyes of animals, the flight of birds, the great slow gestures of trees.”<sup>45</sup>

Finseth concludes her essay on trees, saying that through his art, Tolkien aimed at sharing that wisdom with us, bearing the hope that we, in the same way as Niggle’s neighbour Parish, might find ourselves “more aware of trees as living things, as works of art and beauty, and as sensitive and feeling in their own way”<sup>46</sup>. To conclude, the story of Niggle suggests that the artist achieves to accomplish a work of art, thanks to the participation of other people. Once Niggle gazes at his beautiful painting that has finally become true, he immediately feels the need to have his friend Parish by his side. Sub-creation requires participation in order to become a source of mutual benefit.

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45 Le Guin, K. Ursula. *Earthsea cycle. A wizard of Earthsea*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2012. p.82 in: Finseth, R. Claudia, "Essay: Tolkien’s Trees." *Hobbit Movie News and Rumors* | *TheOneRing.net*<sup>TM</sup>. 21 Oct. 2008. Web. 24 Jan. 2017.

<http://www.theonering.net/torwp/2008/11/03/30350-essay-tolkiens-trees/>

46 Finseth, R. Claudia, "Essay: Tolkien’s Trees." *Hobbit Movie News and Rumors* | *TheOneRing.net*<sup>TM</sup>. 21 Oct. 2008. Web. 24 Jan. 2017.

<http://www.theonering.net/torwp/2008/11/03/30350-essay-tolkiens-trees/>



## 2.4 Perception of places: mountain, sea, city and countryside

As in the case of trees and forests, in *The Lord of the Rings* places are often archetypal, they symbolize or suggest a recurrent idea. R. Muir notes how, lately, the investigation of symbolic meanings of certain environments has become an integral part of landscape studies:

Long-established approaches to the historical study of landscapes have been concerned with investigating the evolution of the form and cultural contents of the landscape [...] Much newer are the attempts to identify the symbolic meanings and messages contained in landscape.<sup>47</sup>

Cosgrove explains that behind landscapes, there are always symbols and meanings, which change depending on the culture, however: “All landscapes are symbolic, although the link between the symbol and what it stands for (its referent) may appear very tenuous”<sup>48</sup>. The idea that environments carry symbolic meanings, is closely connected to the notions of “perceived landscapes” and “landscapes of the mind”; landscape seems to have the power to communicate with man, either thanks to its symbolic tradition, or due to mental connections which the person gazing at the landscape makes. Such an idea, is probably a heritage from the Romantic period, when man stressed the importance of nature, and the artist, above all, had an aesthetic and emotional response to landscape.

Before we look at the symbolic meaning of the landscapes of Middle-earth, it is worthy to make a premise. As far as literature is concerned, at the base of the relationship between the visualization of a landscape and the subsequent emotion which springs from it,

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47 Muir, Richard. *Approaches to Landscape*. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1999. p. 212

48 Cosgrove, D. “Geography is everywhere: culture and symbolism in human landscapes”. In: Gregory, D. and Walford, R. *Horizons in Human Geography*. London: Macmillan, 1989 p. 125

there is the idea that “poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens” (Horace, *Ars Poetica*: poetry is a speaking picture, painting a mute poetry). The belief that literary production and visual representation speak the same truth, comes from classic Greek culture, and it can be applied not just to poetry but also to works of prose, as in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*. R. Hertel, asked himself how come that literature makes us “see” landscapes before our eyes, as though they were real:

Answering this question means embarking on an analysis of the ekphrastic power of texts. For the term 'ekphrasis' denotes exactly this mysterious power, this 'description of physical reality in order to evoke an image in the mind's eye as intense as if the described object were actually before the reader'<sup>49</sup>

Interestingly enough, a feature of the newer approaches to landscape studies, considers the landscape as if it was a text. In particular, W.G. Hoskins (1978) explained that when he was young, he felt that the landscape itself was speaking to him in a language he did not understand, and he felt he had to find a way to decode it.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, not only texts are ekphrastic, but also – in a mutual relationship – when we deal with landscapes as symbols, landscapes are treated as texts. Butlin (1993) developed the idea further:

The landscape as ideology, symbol and as a moral statement are elements of this new cultural/historical geography of landscape [...] Landscape thus becomes [...] a text to be read in a variety of different ways, subject to a wide range of interpretations.<sup>51</sup>

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49 Hertel, Ralf. *Making sense: sense perception in the British novel of the 1980s and 1990s*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005. p. 48

50 Ibid. 47 p. 215

51 Butlin, R.A. *Historical Geography*. London: Edward Arnold, 1993. p. 136-7

As a result, when we analyse the spaces of a literary work, we are not undertaking a task much different than the one modern geographers do, when they try to *read* the symbolic values of landscapes.

Mountains surely are one of the most symbolic environments of *The Lord of the Rings*. Among the most prominent “amon”, (the term used to indicate the English “mountain” or “hill”) there are Amon Sül, the mountain range of the Misty Mountains, Amon Hen, and Amon Amarth<sup>52</sup>. Amon Sül, meaning the Hill of Wind, is also known as Weathertop. It is described as a place which had been “tall and fair”, but was then “burned and broken” (LotR, 185). Since Amon Sül used to be a watch-tower in ancient days, it permits a wide view all around; this also means that it would be easy to detect the presence of someone up there, which exposes the hobbits to a great danger. Indeed, it proves to be almost a lethal place for Frodo, as one of the Ringwraiths of Angmar stabs him with a Morgul-blade, in the attempt to take the Ring. Weathertop is perceived by the reader as a decadent and grim place. It is there that for the first time in the narration, one of the hobbits has a direct encounter with evil. The first connotation which the reader has of the mountain is not positive: it seems to symbolize great danger and constant threat. Later in the novel, the Fellowship decides to take the path that goes up the mountain Caradhras, the highest among the Misty Mountains. In Gimli's words: “Caradhras was called the Cruel, and had an ill name, long years ago, when rumour of Sauron had not been heard in these lands.” (LotR, 289) It is presented as a harsh place, cold and silent. When the Fellowship begins to climb it, snow starts to fall fast. After a while, the company is unable to go further, and again Gimli remarks: “Caradhras has not forgiven us. He has more snow yet to fling at us, if we go on. The sooner we go back and down the better!” (291). It is the only time when

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<sup>52</sup> Algeo, John. *The Toponymy of Middle-earth*. *Names: a Journal of Onomastics* 33.1-2 (March-June, 1985): 84.

the Fellowship needs to change its route because of the pitfalls of a place. The mountain is personified, it seems it has an evil will and wants to seal off the way. Since they cannot cross on the mountain, the members of the Fellowship try to go under it, through the dwarf reign of Moria, where darkness and death await in the forms of orcs and worse. The mountain acquires, for the second time, a negative connotation: it is an obstacle which is difficult – if not impossible – to overcome. Moreover, since the underground city of Moria lays in the depths of the mountain, it is implied that Caradhras is destructive from its roots to its peak. The Balrog, a mythical and malevolent creature made of fire and shadow, dwells in the deepness of the mountain. It will eventually engage a battle with Gandalf, which will prevent him from continuing the journey with the rest of the Fellowship. Thus, Caradhras embodies a mountain of terror, home to death itself.

Amon Hen, together with Tol Brandir, are the two hills that frame the river Rauros. It is also known as the Hill of Sight, as on the top of it, there is a tall and ancient seat which enables everyone to see for leagues all around. When Frodo goes up and sits upon it, he can see almost all the hot spots in Middle-earth, and suddenly he feels aware of an evil, dark eye gazing at him from the fortress of Sauron. After a moment of crisis and despair, Frodo becomes resolute in his choice to continue the journey on his own for the destruction of the Ring. Again, the mountain setting witnesses a turning point in the narration. The Ring-bearer's mind becomes clearer, thanks to the higher perspective which is possible to have from up there. Nonetheless, it is also the place where the Fellowship breaks, Merry and Pippin are abducted by Saruman's orcs, and Boromir is seduced by the evil power of the Ring and shortly thereafter he will die in a battle. The mountains represent places of stillness during the journey. Characters often stop on there. Mountains are places where the equilibrium of characters and situations is altered. They are dangerous places, yet they are

set higher than to the path, and since climax situations often happen there, in some way the mountains “elevate” the characters to the next level of the story.

Lastly, Amon Amarth – also known as Orodruin, but more frequently referred to as “Mount Doom” – is the place where the One Ring was forged and the very seat of Sauron and evil itself. At the core of the mountain, there is an abyss full of flames called the Chambers of Fire, which might make the reader envision a volcano. It is represented as a hellish place of fire and shadow. Indeed, Mount Doom embodies the idea of the Christian hell. It symbolizes Frodo's last stop in his descent into hell. It seems Tolkienian mountains, in *The Lord of the Rings*, carry a different symbology in comparison to the image of divinity and wisdom they have been associated with since Ancient times: Greek classic culture placed its deities on the Olympus, a mythical mountain and the Holy Roman Empire was said to have originated on the Seven Hills of Rome. In the Bible it is said: “And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him.” (Mark 3:13) Hence, mountains are places where it is easier to be connected to god or divinities. They have an important part in Christian scriptures. For instance, the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments on mountain Sinai. Also, the Lord called his people to Mount Zion to become closer to Him. In other religions too, devotees climb mountains to be closer to their god or be one with him. Concerning this, J. Fraim states:

Throughout history, mountains have symbolized constancy, eternity, firmness and stillness. Mountain tops, notes J.C. Cooper, "are associated with sun, rain and thunder gods and, in early traditions of the feminine godhead, the mountain was the earth and female, with the sky, clouds, thunder and lightning as the fecundating male." On the spiritual level, observes Cooper, "mountain tops represent the state of full consciousness." Cooper notes that pilgrimages up sacred mountains symbolize aspiration and renunciation of worldly desires.<sup>53</sup>

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53 Fraim, John. "Symbolism of Place: Natural Places." *Symbolism.Org*. The GreatHouse Company, 2001. Web. 02 Feb. 2017.

Tolkien might have inverted the symbology so recurrently associated to the mountains, as for him, good is to be found in the small things. Mountains, grand and massive, are places of mystery and danger, often of flames and death. Instead, a tree, a leaf, a small hole in the earth are proposed as symbols of purity, of communion with nature. It is in those places where good flourishes. In the same way, in the small hobbits lay a great courage and strong will: the evil Sauron – despite his colossal presence – is ultimately overcome by the resolution of one single hobbit.

Although the sea never appears in *The Lord of the Rings* as a proper setting, it is many times referred to (precisely, more than a hundred times<sup>54</sup>). When it does not serve as a mere geographical landmark, it is mostly associated with elves and their transitory condition in Middle-earth. In the *Silmarillion* it is explained that Valinor, the primordial Land of the Valar, is west over the sea (although, after the destruction of Numenor, it has disappeared from Arda). Culturally, elves associate the western sea with their journey to Valinor: they identify the sea with going/returning home<sup>55</sup>. As already pointed out, the story of the One Ring, happens when the time of Elves in Middle-earth has come to an end; as a consequence, they are drawn to the sea. This is explicit when Legolas sees some seagulls near the river Anduin:

‘Look!’ he cried. ‘Gulls! They are flying far inland. A wonder they are to me and a trouble to my heart. Never in all my life had I met them, until we came to Pelargir, and there I heard them crying in the air as we rode to the battle of the ships. Then I stood still, forgetting war in Middle-earth; for their wailing voices spoke to me of the Sea. The Sea! Alas! I have not yet beheld it. But deep in the hearts of all my

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<http://www.symbolism.org/writing/books/sp/2/home.html>

54 See: “The, Sea”: Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. Index. p. 1172

55 "Sea-Longing." *Ask About Middle Earth*. Tumblr.com, 12 Feb. 2014. Web. 04 Feb. 2017. <http://askmiddleearth.tumblr.com/post/76446842914/sea-longing>

kindred lies the sea-longing, which it is perilous to stir. Alas! for the gulls. No peace shall I have again under beech or under elm.’ (LotR, 873)

Indeed, the journey across the sea is the ultimate one of all elves. At the end of the story, Frodo and Gandalf too will be allowed to leave for the Undying Lands (as Valinor is also referred to), with Galadriel and others. It is a symbolic journey towards the heavens and immortal life. The sea represents the end of life's sorrows and distress. The sea-longing which Legolas experiences, recalls the human state of melancholy connected to Man's mortal condition. In addition to being a symbol, the sea – together with the seagulls – appears to be what T.S Eliot would define “objective correlative”<sup>56</sup>: they stand for an emotion, that is a profound longing for home. In the *Silmarillion*, concerning the creation of the world of Arda, Tolkien says:

It is said by the Eldar that in water there lives yet the echo of the Music of the Ainur more than in any substance else that is in this Earth; and many of the Children of Iluvatar hearken still unsated to the voices of the Sea, and yet know not for what they listen.<sup>56</sup>

In the cosmogony of *The Lord of the Rings*, it is music which gives life to all creatures. Since it is said to be still trace of that music in the waters, the value of the sea as symbol of new life is strengthened. Of course, such connotation of the sea is not new in the literary panorama, where it has embodied different, and often contrasting, images; as M. Ferber noted:

The literature of the sea is ancient and vast: from the *Odyssey*, the *Argonautica*, and the story of Jonah through Melville's *Moby-Dick*, London's *The Sea-Wolf*, several novels of Conrad's, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* [...] Among many

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<sup>56</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R., Christopher Tolkien, and Ted Nasmith. *The Silmarillion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. p. 3

other things, the sea has symbolized chaos and the bridge among orderly lands, life and death, time and timelessness, menace and lure, boredom and the sublime.<sup>57</sup>

As far as *The Lord of the Rings* is concerned though, the sea never represents chaos or menace. Its connotation is positive and mystic. It is true that it is connected to death, but in the catholic sense; it is death perceived as catharsis and new, immortal existence.

Dealing with the countryside and the city as symbolical landscapes of *The Lord of the Rings* is not an easy task. Differently from forests, mountains and sea, these are not specific environments in the story. The Third Age is intended as a pre-industrial moment, where the contrast between city centre and countryside outskirts simply does not yet exist. Places are characterized by the people who dwell there, and vice versa. Despite this, the categories of “city” and “countryside” are still present as background of some places. Moreover, Tolkien is a writer of the twentieth century, which means he was well aware of both realities while he was writing. In the story, cities are all different one another, not built following the same scheme. Among the most important in the story, for sure figure Rivendell and Lothlórien for the Elves, Minas Morgul for the evil forces, Moria for the Dwarves, Minas Tirith and Edoras for Men. The only other prominent settlement of Middle-earth, which cannot be considered a city, is the Shire. As already seen in the chapter about “Pastoralism”, the Shire evokes an idealization of the village, of a rural idyllic place, it is the embodiment of a happy life in the countryside. It is a setting, which the author seemed to have the will to distinguish from all the others. Apart from the elvish cities, which are depicted with an otherworldly aura, all the others have been to a certain measure corrupted. Cities imply that there must be someone reigning over them, therefore they imply power. And where there is power, there is unfailingly the threat of evil. This is

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<sup>57</sup> Ferber, Michael. *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999. p. 179



what the Ring itself represents and one of the great morals behind the story. Before the return of the rightful king of Gondor, heir of Elendil, the city of Minas Tirith was ruled by a steward, Denethor. Denethor was seduced by the magic of the Palantír, which he used in the attempt to look over Sauron's doings. Instead, Sauron drove him mad with despair, through the Palantír. With the news of Boromir's death, his favourite and eldest son, and when Minas Tirith seemed to be doomed, Denethor increased his bitterness and became completely insane. He made his servants prepare a pyre, in which he wanted to be burnt alive with unconscious Faramir. In the end, although Faramir is spared, Denethor succeeds in accomplishing his foolish plan: he “wreathed in fire and smoke he took up the staff of his stewardship that lay at his feet and broke it on his knee. Casting the pieces into the blaze he bowed and laid himself on the table, clasping the palantír with both hands upon his breast” (LotR, 854). In the same way, Theoden, king of Rohan, had been increasingly poisoned by the words of his counsellor Grima, who was secretly at the services of Saruman. At the time of the war of the Ring, Theoden judgement has been completely prejudiced and the region of Rohan is in a state of decay. It is only thanks to Gandalf the White, that the spell is finally broken and Theoden regains conscience of himself. Eventually though, in the same way as all the other characters who did not win against corruption, he will find death. When the Shire is industrialized by Saruman – a process which would recall the conversion from village to city – it is not just the land which is affected. Some hobbits too become corrupted and greedy, so much so that they start exploiting other hobbits and praising machines. The view of the city as a corruptive entity, opposed to a pure countryside, was pointed by J. Fraim:

This symbolic significance of the city is better understood in contrast with the "non-city" which surrounds it. The city-versus-nature contrast is one of the major symbolic contrasts in story forms for the city is the greatest overall symbol of

mankind. Raymond Williams in *The Country And The City* notes that the country offers "the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue." On the other hand, the city: "has gathered the idea of [...] a place of noise, worldliness and ambition [...]. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times."<sup>58</sup>

Such symbolism behind the contrast city-countryside, is present and preserved in *The Lord of the Rings*, although the city is intended just as prototypical, and not in the modern sense. It is not the city itself, with its rhythms and life-pace, which corrupts man. It is the fragility of the ruling class, which leads to its corruption. And when the governments of a city is corrupted, so too will be the city and its people. Differently, in the countryside the law is still laid down by nature, and as long as people respect natural rules and live by nature's pace, they will not be corrupted by power. A proof of that, is when Tom Bombadil – who represents Nature itself – appears to be completely immune to the power of the Rings. He stands for the incorruption of Nature.

The symbolism which is to be found in Middle-earth's landscapes, surely influences the reader in the reception of the story, and it adds meanings to situations and characters. To conclude, as Muir stated: "Symbolism is elusive and shifting, yet still a forceful component in our perception of places"<sup>59</sup>.

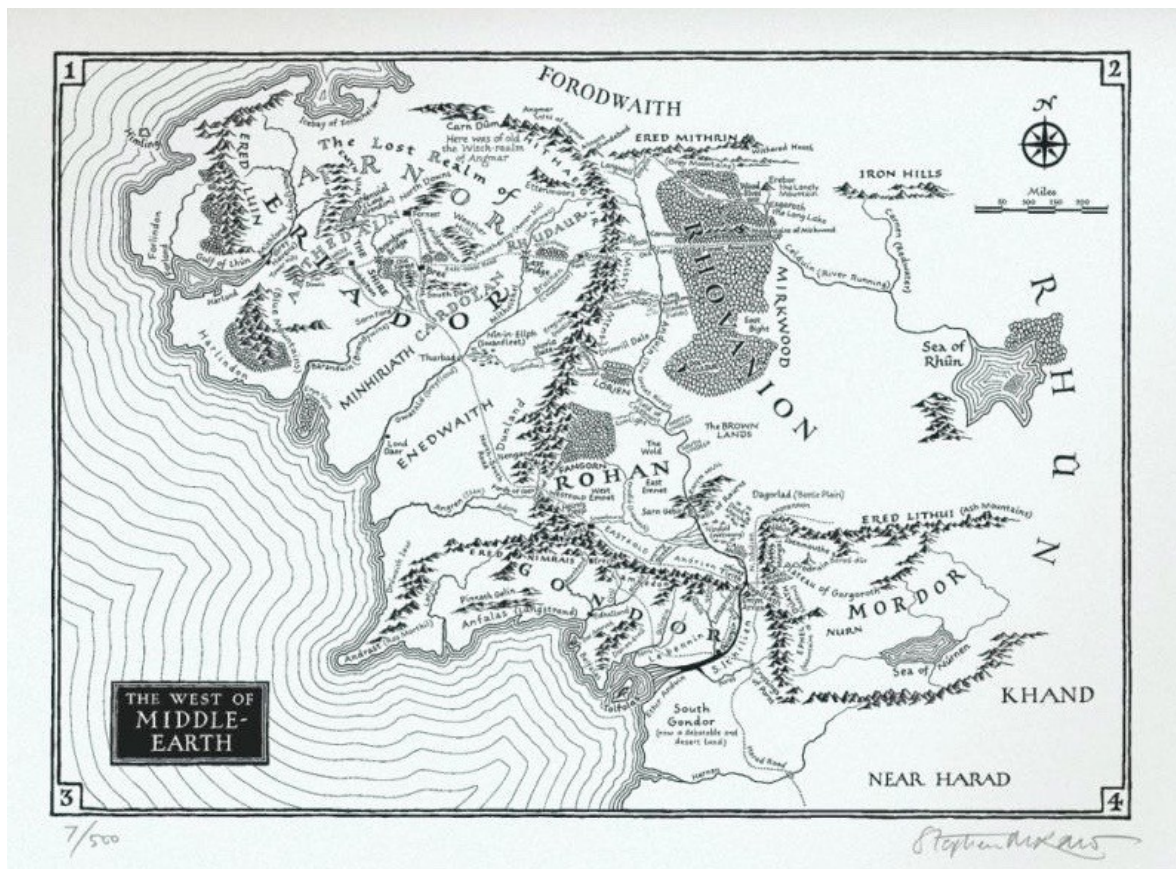
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58 Fraim, John. "Symbolism of Place: Cultural Places." *Symbolism.Org*. The GreatHouse Company, 2001. Web. 02 Feb. 2017.

<http://www.symbolism.org/writing/books/sp/2/home.html>

59 Ibid. 47 p. 241

## 2.5 Toponymy and Map



Raw, Steven. "Map of Middle-earth."<sup>60</sup>

In order to further convey the sense of space, and to increase the credibility and coherence of his mythology, Tolkien paid a meticulous attention to toponymy – the onomastics of places. Also, the drawings of maps of Middle-earth, which he provided to his readers, prove an important reference point while reading. Regarding this, Brisbois noted how:

Tolkien's use of onomastics is integral to the reader's interpretation of the text. Earlier Fantastic worlds, like Lewis Carroll's Wonderland or Frank L. Baum's Oz,

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<sup>60</sup> Raw, Stephen. *Map of Middle-earth*. Digital image. *Stephenraw.com*. Web. 04 Feb. 2017. <http://www.stephenraw.com/content/british-library-buys-tolkien-maps>

N.B: this map is reproduced in *The Lord of the Rings* (HarperCollins, London 1994) and all subsequent English editions.

were steps towards the complexity of Middle-earth, but their landscapes and maps are too disconnected, too symbolic to be comparable to modern maps and geography.<sup>61</sup>

The particular importance given to onomastics, is probably to be ascribed to Tolkien's passion for philology and language. Notably, each people in Middle-earth originated from an invented language, which had a specific alphabet, specific characteristics and sounds. The language is meant to resemble its people. Considering all the dialects and variants, Tolkien created no less than fourteen languages for Middle-earth<sup>62</sup>; he wanted names to suit, to be evocative for the respective characters and places. Christopher L. Robinson wondered what it is that makes a name fit or sound appropriate in *The Lord of the Rings*, the answer is that: "The names in J.R.R. Tolkien's fiction are fitting [...], reflecting by way of their source words, sound symbolism, or etymology some characteristic of their designees"<sup>63</sup>. Indeed, the tool "nomen omen" is a recurrent one in fantasy stories and children's book, but in *The Lord of the Rings* it is taken to a whole new level, due to the complexity and vastness of onomastics. To better understand Tolkien's creative process, it is possible to go through his "Notes on Nomenclature", where he explains what he wanted his invented names to convey to the readers. In the Notes, he clarifies ideas on the languages he used in the process of naming:

In the original text, English represents the Common Speech of the supposed period. Names that are given in modern English therefore represent names in the Common

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61 Brisbois, Michael J. *Where the shadows lie nature, modernity and the audience of Middle-earth*. Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada = Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 2006. p. 40

62 Christopher L., Robinson. "If the name fits: names in J.R.R. Tolkien's fiction." *Tolkien News RSS*. 11 Mar. 2013. Web. 05 Feb. 2017.  
<http://www.tolkienlibrary.com/press/1088-if-the-name-fits-names-in-JRR-Tolkien-fiction.php>

63 Ibid. 62

Speech, often but not always being translations of older names in other languages, [...]. The language of translation now replaces English as the equivalent of the Common Speech; the names in English form should therefore be translated into the other language *according to their meaning* (as closely as possible)<sup>64</sup>.

Further on, he says that there are some names which he translated from the Elvish, and wanted to render into English in a precise way, as far as meaning and sound are concerned. “Rivendell” is cited as an example of one of these names, being a translation of the Elvish “Imladris” ‘Glen of the Cleft’. When these terms occur, the author says:

It is desirable to translate such names, since to leave them unchanged would disturb *the carefully devised scheme of nomenclature and introduce an unexplained element without a place in the feigned linguistic history of the period.*<sup>65</sup>

Names are thus meant to be a cohesive element in the story: they are chosen according to their etymology, sound and evocative meaning. They must “fit” in the sense that they need to be coherent with other names and with the features of the character/place they refer to. In the narration, often places are alluded to, well before characters get there. It is only relying on the name then, that at first the reader creates some expectations and ideas about a place. In particular, there are some place names, which totally represent the environment they refer to, and add value and substance to them. Let us look at some examples. Although it will be reached by Frodo and Sam only towards the end of the story, Mount Doom is foreshadowed in the imagination of both, characters and readers, from the beginning of the story. The word “doom”, Tolkien says in the “Notes on Nomenclature”,

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64 Hammond, Wayne G., and Christina Scull. *The Lord of the Rings: a Reader's Companion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005. “Notes on Nomenclature” pp. 750-781

65 Ibid. 64, *my emphasis*

means in its original sense 'judgment'; he adds:

It has in English, partly owing to its sound, and largely to its special use in doomsday, become loaded with senses of death, finality and fate (impending or foretold). The use in the text as a word descriptive of sound [...] associated with boom is nonetheless meant (and would by most English readers be felt) to recall the noun doom, with its sense of disaster. Mount Doom [...] is the Common Speech name of the volcano Orodruin ('Mountain of red flame'), but was a translation of its other Elvish name Amon Amarth ('Hill of Doom'), given to Sauron's forge-mountain because it was linked in ancient and little-understood prophecies with the 'doom', the final end of the Third Age.<sup>66</sup>

All these features which characterize Mount Doom, are condensed in its name. In the same way, if the reader comes across the name River Withywindle, he/she will probably visualize already a setting for a river with this appellative. The name becomes the first attribute of the place, thus it provides characterization. The Withywindle is a river in the Old Forest, intended to be in the language of the Shire. Its name alone suggests that it was a “winding river bordered by willows (withies). Withy- is not uncommon in English place-names, but - windle does not actually occur”<sup>67</sup>. Nonetheless, the suffix -windle may evoke “wind” and it may recall by assonance words as twinkle, jingle, tingle, wriggle. Thus, it can convey ideas of a river bordered by willows, whose waters are shimmering and tinkling, a bit rush and rippling.

Since its first publication, *The Lord of the Rings* has had maps of the regions of Middle-earth, drawn by Tolkien's son, Christopher. Continuous arrangements, re-drawings and extensions have been made to increase to their clarity<sup>68</sup>. Michael Irwin noted that maps

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66 Ibid. 64

67 Ibid. 64

68 More on this in the section “Note on the Maps” of Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

are frequently included on works of fiction. He investigated on the “status of such cartographic representations of usually non-existent areas” and infers that: “any fictional map is a statement of intent, proclaiming that in some sense 'place' will be of importance in the narrative concerned.”<sup>69</sup> The map is expected to have a practical function, to clarify the space of the story through the establishing of directions and eventually distances. Still, Irwin states, this basic function is far more complex than it seems, and maps provide other interesting services as well (26). The creation of maps, suggests that Tolkien performed the part of the geographer when he was shaping Middle-earth, according to Meinig's definition of landscape as Place:

In this view, every landscape is a locality [...] such a view is also old and central ground to the geographer, whose field has at times been defined as a study of the characteristics of places. The chief badge of the geographer is the map. To him a place is at once a location, an environment, and a real composition, and the last is best expressed on a map, a symbolization of the spatial arrangement of the elements of the locality.<sup>70</sup>

*The Lord of the Rings* is basically the story of a journey, as the theme of the quest is present almost continuously in the story. The possibility to follow on a detailed map the route of the protagonists, and to keep track of the places they see, results in a more thorough involvement of the readers in the story itself. Irwin notes that the author seems to invite his readers to take their bearings in the richly detailed fictitious landscape of Middle-earth (34). The map was probably a tool used by the author himself when creating the story, a sort of compass which enabled him to be coherent and never contradictory; besides, also the pleasure which derives from 'sub-creation' must not be underrated or

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69 Brown, Peter, and Michael Irwin. *Literature & place: 1800-2000*. Oxford: Lang, 2006. p. 24-5

70 Meinig, D. W. et al. *The Interpretation of ordinary landscapes: geographical essays*. New York: Oxford U Press, 1979. p. 45

forgotten, if we look at the motifs behind mapping Middle-earth (Irwin, 35). However, it still appears that the predominant intent was the creation of a powerful, convincing piece. This is confirmed also in Tolkien's biography by H. Carpenter (1977), where the labour and difficulty, which derived from depicting such a detailed picture, are described:

Not content with writing a large and complex book, he felt he must ensure that every single detail fitted satisfactorily into the total pattern. Geography, chronology and nomenclature all had to be entirely consistent. [...] His son Christopher helped him by drawing an elaborate map of the terrain covered by the story. [...] But the map itself was not enough, and he made endless calculations of time and distance [...] This was partly his habitual insistence on perfection, partly sheer revelling in the fun of “sub-creation”, but most of all a concern to provide a totally convincing picture.”<sup>71</sup>

Finally, Irwin notes that the consistency of the maps and the resulting imaginative products, are determined also by the associations to nomenclature – which, as already seen, was certainly accurate. Irwin concludes stating: “it is surely true that much of the life of a fictional map derives from the names on it” (35).

There are places figuring on the maps of Middle-earth, which were not even involved in the story of *The Lord of the Rings*, and that are characterized only by their name. They might be relevant for other stories, such as that of the *Silmarillion* or the *Hobbit*, or they might be there just for themselves. Nonetheless, they leave the door open for readers to imagine new possible or alternative adventures, thus they play a great role in expanding imagination and strengthen the charms which the story exercises on readers. J. Zanger supported this view, and he pointed out a connection between maps and heroic fantasy:

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<sup>71</sup> Carpenter, Humphrey. *Tolkien: a biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977. p. 194-5



Maps have become standard accompaniments to heroic fantasies, not because they import any verisimilitude, since that is never the intention of fantasy, but rather because they illustrate graphically the fragmentation of the fantastic world, and the binding, base-touching aspect of the quest the protagonists customarily pursue. Each frontier offers a new landscape, a new folk, a new testing, or a new alliance.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Schlobin, Roger C. *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame, 1982. p. 80

### 3.0

#### AN APOLOGY FOR CHARACTERS OF FANTASY

Characterization as a feature of narratology, is explained as: “the process of ascribing properties to names which results in agents having these properties in the storyworld.”<sup>1</sup> When characterization is “direct”, a trait is ascribed explicitly to a character; when it is “indirect”, it is the result of the reader's deductions drawn from the text. Therefore: “the term 'characterization' can be used to refer to the ascription of a property to a character, but also for the overall process and result of attributing traits to a given character.”<sup>2</sup> Dealing with the realm of fiction, there is a distinction to be made. With fantasy stories, the reader is not assumed to have any specific prior knowledge of characters. They are the product of the author's imagination, not just as far as their characterization is concerned, but often as new species too. On the other hand, works of realistic literature, contain stories about seemingly real characters. The reader is supposed to have some knowledge of a realistic character, as they share something intrinsic: they are humans, characters have the same features as real people. All is left to know about a realistic character are the distinctive traits – mental and physical. Therefore, the realm of non-fiction and that of fantasy<sup>3</sup> seem to provide a different context. Characters of fantasy do not belong to our primary world, not even in a possible way. For obvious reasons, they need to be presented and characterized in a different way than characters of realistic fiction. On the status of character within narratology, and the relationship between character and story, Jannidis

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1 Jannidis, Fotis: "Character". Paragraph 1-45. In: Hühn, Peter et al. (eds.): *the living handbook of narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University Press. 24 Feb. 2013. Web. 08 Feb. 2017. <http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Character>

2 Ibid. 1

3 In this chapter I will not be concerned with the categorization of “fantasy” as a genre, therefore I will use the term to indicate all works of fiction which are different from those of realistic fiction.

noted:

Viewing characters as entities of a storyworld does not imply that they are self-contained. On the contrary, the storyworld is constructed during the process of narrative communication, and characters thus form a part of the signifying structures which motivate and determine the narrative communication. Characters also play a role in thematic, symbolic or other constellations of the text and of the storyworld.<sup>4</sup>

This is true of both, fantasy-world characters and fictitious-though-realistic ones. What seems to be different, is their “roundness” or “flatness”. Edward M. Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), provided a differentiation between those “flat” characters, who have one distinctive trait which distinguishes them, and those “round”, who have several complex and even contradictory aspects. The difference between the two kinds of characters is still considered valid nowadays, though further specifications have followed. In Forster's own words, flat characters, are: “sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures and, in their purest form, they are constructed around a single idea or quality.”<sup>5</sup> The “great advantage” of such characters, is that they are “easily recognised by the “reader’s emotional eye and easily remembered [...] afterwards” (76-77). A round character, is the one: “capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat (85). Until recent years, most of the critics considered characters from the realm of fantasy principally “flat”<sup>6</sup>. On the contrary, since their authors are seeking for the creation of individuals recalling real people, characters from realistic fiction are said to be usually “round”. Concerning this, S. Mandala stated:

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4 Ibid. 1

5 Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the novel*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927. p. 75

6 See: Mobley 1973; Brooke-Rose 1981; Thompson 1982; Hume 1984; Attebery 1992 (full citation in the bibliography).

Characters can be either represented people, or plot devices, roles or types (such as 'hero') with specific functions [...] In the critical literature, alternative world texts are typically viewed as plot-driven narratives (e.g. see Brooke-Rose 1981: 248; Hume 1984:150; Thompson 1982: 223), and their characters corresponding analysed mostly as types [...].<sup>7</sup>

It must be made clear, that Forster was not implying that round characters were somehow come off more successfully, or in any way better, than flat ones. The status of “flat” or “round” does not stand for a positive rather than a negative attribute, they are both equally valid for the scopes of the narration. They simply fulfil different purposes. Despite this, in the past critics tended to label flat characters of fantasy as “failed” characters. Indeed, as Mandala noted:

In discussions on alternative world fiction, however, the difference between character-as-type and character-as-individual is often interpreted in terms of deficit, considered positively as 'round'. [...] With only few exceptions characters in alternative world texts are dismissed as flat and poorly drawn. In fantasy, it is said, characters 'are often thin' (Hume 1984: 123), 'superficial' (Brooke-Rose 1981: 248), so lacking in depth they 'could often go nameless' (Mobley 1973: 127). (121)

These ideas may be true of archetypal-type stories, such as those of the folktale. Secondary-world fantasy like *The Lord of the Rings*, and all fantasy series which have become so popular nowadays, do not present the same kind of characters which Hume, Brooke-Rose and Mobley were probably referring to. If we think of Tolkien's characters, it will be apparent that most of them undergo a process of formation. The “Fantasy Bildungsroman”<sup>8</sup> redefines the coming-of-age narrative through a fantasy frame. With the

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7 Mandala, Susan. *Language in Science Fiction and Fantasy: The Question of Style*. London: Continuum, 2010. p. 120

8 Tschirner, Susanne. *Der Fantasy-Bildungsroman*. Meitingen: Corian-Verlag, 1989.

establishment of fantasy series as extremely popular works of literature, the pattern of the Bildungsroman (formation novel) has been applied to the fantasy genre. The Bildungsroman presents a young protagonist who undergoes a process of spiritual growth, and after a quest obtains maturity, self-knowledge and wisdom. As a consequence, the protagonists of such narrations will necessarily be developing characters. If we look at the characters of *The Lord of the Rings*, it is not possible to claim that they are shallow sketches, devoid of depth. In the story, a great number of characters appear, some can be ascribed to the “round” category and some others to the “flat” one. In both cases, the author pays a great attention to their characterization: name, genealogy, thoughts, actions, background and personality, are all taken into account when dealing with a character. Moreover, characters such as Frodo *in primis*, but also all the other members of the fellowship of the Ring, are presented with their strengths and weaknesses – which are the product of experience, in addition to personal predisposition. As a result, almost all the primary characters of the story possess intensity and depth. They obviously change a lot over time and space, which is a prerogative in quest-like stories. There are (mainly) secondary characters which are flat, they embody a prototype and do not evolve in any considerable way during the story span. Nonetheless, they represent fixed points for the reader, who is reassured by their presence and knows what to expect from them, as well as for round characters, which are undergoing a process of change.

Another criticism which was advanced to fantasy, is that:

Sometimes characterization is brushed aside altogether by supposing that a work is valuable for what it tells us about 'widespread cultural values and assumptions', an argument that Attebery (1992:9) puts forward for the entire sub-genre of sword and sorcery.<sup>9</sup>

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9 Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of fantasy*. Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1992 in: Mandala,

Again, let us take *The Lord of the Rings* as example. It is true that behind its pages there are valuable ideas about “cultural values and assumptions”. Indeed, one of Tolkien's aim as far as content is concerned, was to provide a story permeated with high values, which the English people could feel its own and drive inspiration from. Many values from the Catholic faith were also part of the story. Yet, as important as the moral and values of the story (if not even more), are the characters. They are not mere shapes, created so that they could act the story, they are not just functional for their message. Characters are important for what they are and represent individually. The main protagonist of the story, the Ring-bearer, is the hobbit Frodo. First of all, he is a hobbit, and Tolkien spends pages and pages dealing with the characterization of the species (“Concerning Hobbits” and their habits is a section which goes from page 1 to page 10 of LotR). Then, much is said of his family and house. His personality is described, his tastes too. Then his friends are presented, and though hobbits as well, they appear to be different than Frodo. Regardless of its classification as round or flat, it is made clear during the story that every character has its fate and place in the events. Fantasy stories are defined by C. Sullivan and B. White as:

a conscious production, a deliberate response to a gap between the real and the desired, under the control of the individual. Fantasy manifests social anxieties, taking the same compensatory role at the level of society as psychoanalytic theory provides for it at the level of the individual.<sup>10</sup>

Hence, fantasy stories seem to provide a “psychoanalysis for society”, its characters are asked to confront with materializations of collective challenges and fears. Such a pattern is

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Susan. *Language in Science Fiction and Fantasy: The Question of Style*. London: Continuum, 2010. p. 122

10 Sullivan, Ceri, and Barbara White. *Writing and Fantasy*. London: Longman, 1999. p.3

typical of the folktale. In such a narration, the reader will not be concerned with all the traits of the personality of a hero-type character, who has to fight against a dragon and later become King – with all the psychological parallels that this entails<sup>11</sup>. In a case like this, the main interest of the story is provided by the battle itself, which corresponds to the confrontation with common fears, which everyone has to face in life. To endow such a character with psychological depth, could be perceived as a discordant note, maybe even a forcing in the narration. It would represent a shift from the real focus. Such an apology was dismissed by critics as Attebery:

Character is generally poor, [...] commentators say, but that need not be a concern because it is the ideas that are the heroes, or character universals such as 'loyalty' and 'courage' that matter, or the mythic element, the soul-feeding story, that counts, particularly in fantasy.<sup>12</sup>

Again, this may be true proven that by “fantasy” we also mean to include the folktale. Since characters from the folktale move in an environment of archetypes and have to face archetypal enemies, they too are often forced to be represented as archetypal figures. But in fantasy stories such as *The Lord of the Rings*, events are often not archetypal and neither are characters. If – for instance – the psychological novel aims at depicting the psychology of characters, fantasy stories have usually different purposes: the definition of human identity, which “springs from direct personal confrontation with the clashing of cosmic

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11 More on this in: Diamond, Stephen A. "Why Myths Still Matter (Part Four): Facing Your Inner Minotaur and Following Your Ariadnean Thread." *Psychology Today*. Sussex Publishers, 19 Dec. 2009. Web. 10 Feb. 2017.  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/evil-deeds/200912/why-myths-still-matter-part-four-facing-your-inner-minotaur-and-following> and: Moore, Robert L., and Max J. Havlick. *Facing the dragon: confronting personal and spiritual grandiosity*. Wilmette, IL: Chiron Publications, 2003.

12 Ibid. 7 p. 121-22

forces of light and dark powers, [...] that identity is created in the choices that result from this confrontation”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, there is a difference between flat yet convincing and adequate characters, and unsuccessful and unconvincing characters. It is, of course, the same difference that there is between a convincing story and an unsuccessful story, an idea which goes beyond the sole characterization. *The Lord of the Rings* surely does not belong to the folktale, and even though there are archetypal battles, they are fought by thoroughly developed characters. One of the tools which make them convincing, J. Timmerman noted, is language. He stated that in *The Lord of the Rings*, characters are often satisfying, thanks to their convincing language: they have an “appropriate diction”<sup>14</sup>. He then indicates Gollum's fragmented and guttural way of speaking as example of his theory, and indeed in that case the language represents the character. Language is surely one of the main ingredients which compose a character, particularly in *The Lord of the Rings*. Furthermore, the representation of the environment is a way that the author uses to indirectly shape the characters who belong to that environment. There is strong bond which connects the peoples of Middle-earth and their land. It is a mutual process of shaping: land-characters and vice versa. This is showed at the utmost in the description of Lórien and the elves, and the Shire and the hobbits. Yet, it is also true of the land of Mordor and the evil forces. If it is true that in reality the local context influences people, the effect is even more dramatic with the characters of *The Lord of the Rings* and their land.

Tolkien is able to give equally careful attention to both climax scenes, and characters. The story develops because of the characters' choices, which are often difficult

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13 Mathews, Richard. *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. New York: Twayne, 1997. p. 91

14 Timmerman, John H. *Other worlds: the fantasy genre*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green U Popular Press, 1983. p. 52 in: Mandala, Susan. *Language in Science Fiction and Fantasy: The Question of Style*. London: Continuum, 2010. p. 127



and pondered deeply. The narration unfolds on many layers. The author provides two different types of hero: the conventional hero Aragorn, and the unexpected and atypical figure of the small hobbit Frodo, who carries in his hand the destiny of the whole world. By the end of Book one, two different narrative strands originate from them, basically following the two parallel journeys of the characters and their process of growth. At any rate, it is impossible to dismiss them as not complex.

### 3.1 Heroes and Villains in *The Lord of the Rings*

During the whole story span of *The Lord of the Rings*, the world is in a delicate balance. Good is constantly threatened and weighted against evil. The author definitely pays more attention to the characterization of good characters; the story is always seen from their perspective and the reader inevitably tends to sympathize with them. As far as evil forces are concerned, it seems they are basically constituted by a vast number of orcs, creatures which, as Mathews observed: “are killed off in droves during battles and raids, and they seem to take little notice of the loss of their fellows. Robbed of any individual significance, they have the quality of interchangeable parts.”<sup>15</sup> Orcs are all flat characters, in the sense Forster meant. Although all the peoples of Middle-earth are presented with their own story, traditions and culture, Orcs do not need any particular characterization. They only fulfil the duties which Sauron or Saruman order them; they are corrupted creatures and this is all that the reader needs to know. Orcs have the narrative role of the antagonists, but differently from Sauron and Saruman, none of them stands as anti-hero. Even in the appendix concerning the languages and peoples of Middle-earth (LotR, 1127-1133), not that much is said of Orcs: they have been bred by the Dark Power since the Elder Days, they had no language of their own, so they communicated perverting other tongues to their liking. They are “filled with malice” (LotR, 1131) and hate everybody, even those of their own kind. Sauron, the Dark Lord chief of evil forces, is never clearly described during the narration. He is referred to, more like if he was an idea rather than a character which possesses the faculty of acting actively in the story. He is the embodiment of evil itself and he too is a flat character, though far from being poorly drawn or superficial. In fact, notably the novel is named after Sauron, the Lord who created the rings. He was defeated

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<sup>15</sup> Mathews, Richard. *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. New York: Twayne, 1997. p. 74

in his first attempt to conquer Middle-earth, by an alliance of Men and Elves in the second Age. Still, he was not annihilated and his spirit endured as the One Ring was not destroyed. By the Third Age, when the story takes place, Gandalf states: “the Dark Lord has indeed arisen again [...] and returned to his ancient fastness in the Dark Tower of Mordor.” (LotR, 51) He only lacks one thing to regain all his power back and submit the Free folk to darkness, that is the One Ring. In the *Silmarillion*, the origins of Sauron are explained. He was one of the spirits named Maiar, who helped the primordial Valar in the creation of the world. He was then corrupted by Melkor, the fallen Valar who wanted to destroy the world. Sauron became his lieutenant and learnt how to submit the other to his will. Eventually, Melkor was defeated and Sauron thus became the ultimate Dark Lord. In the Second Age he forged the Rings of Power to be given to the major rulers among Men, Elves and Dwarves. In secret, he forged one more ring to himself, intended to seduce the other ring-bearers to the will of this One Ring. As soon as Sauron used his ring though, the three elves felt the evil and took off theirs. The nine men were subdued to his power, and became the Nazgul, Sauron's servants. And the seven dwarves managed to resist but developed a destructive thirst for gold. Sauron was not satisfied and declared war. It is in this war that he was defeated and lost the Ring. In his fall from grace to evil, Sauron may recall the figure of the Christian Satan. Of course, as Delbanco noted, the Christian Satan cannot be said to be an homogenous entity, but rather a combination of elements from different sources, “based on the Scriptures only to a certain extent.”<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the two share some essential points. S. Ekman claims they have the same function within their

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16 Delbanco, A. *The Death of Satan*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995. p. 24 in: Ekman, Stefan. "Satan, Sauron, and Sundry Dark Lords: Evil Incarnate in Fantasy." *Academia.edu - Share research*. Web. 11 Feb. 2017.  
[https://www.academia.edu/1283783/Satan\\_Sauron\\_and\\_Sundry\\_Dark\\_Lords\\_Evil\\_Incarnate\\_in\\_Fantasy](https://www.academia.edu/1283783/Satan_Sauron_and_Sundry_Dark_Lords_Evil_Incarnate_in_Fantasy)

respective narrations: they are both the embodiment of evil and they are given a major part to play, yet a little space is given to their personalities; “in the Bible, the devil has been given precious little personality and a major part to play, which is true for Sauron as well.”<sup>17</sup> Ekman also noted that Ruth Noel compares Sauron to a number of other “dark and baleful gods: Pluto, Balar, and, primarily, Odin”<sup>18</sup>, thus his origins seems to be both christian and pagan. In *The Lord of the Rings*, evil cannot be explained or understood. It exists for its sake, and the choice characters have is whether being seduced by it or resist. Sauron's ultimate scope is power and ruling over, he desires to control and submit others. The weapons he uses are first of all war, but he also influence others through the Ring and the Palantiri, the Seeing-Stones – through which he keeps contact and track of Saruman, and drives Denethor mad. Though the character of Sauron, the author wants to show how the thirst of power can be dazzling and fatal. Power can indeed be pointed at as Sauron's fatal flaw: the Ring he created endows its owner with such powers, that nobody who possesses it would want to destroy it willingly. This is the assumption for which Sauron is not able to conceive the journey of Frodo. He would never expect anyone as pure as to renounce to the possession of the Ring and what it implies. He is not described physically, he is represented by a never resting eye of fire, whose gaze only a few could endure. It scans all around from the top of the tower of Barad-dûr, and Frodo confronts it twice before he arrives in Mordor. The first time that Frodo sees the eye, happens when he looks into the Mirror of Galadriel:

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17 Ekman, Stefan. "Satan, Sauron, and Sundry Dark Lords: Evil Incarnate in Fantasy." Academia.edu - Share research. Web. 11 Feb. 2017.

[https://www.academia.edu/1283783/Satan\\_Sauron\\_and\\_Sundry\\_Dark\\_Lords\\_Evil\\_Incarnate\\_in\\_Fantasy](https://www.academia.edu/1283783/Satan_Sauron_and_Sundry_Dark_Lords_Evil_Incarnate_in_Fantasy)

18 Noel, R. S. *The Mythologies of Tolkien's Middle-earth*. St Albans, Herts:

Granada, 1979. p. 96 in: Stefan, Ekman. "Satan, Sauron, and Sundry Dark Lords: Evil Incarnate in Fantasy." *Academia.edu - Share research*. Web. 11 Feb. 2017.

[https://www.academia.edu/1283783/Satan\\_Sauron\\_and\\_Sundry\\_Dark\\_Lords\\_Evil\\_Incarnate\\_in\\_Fantasy](https://www.academia.edu/1283783/Satan_Sauron_and_Sundry_Dark_Lords_Evil_Incarnate_in_Fantasy)

But suddenly the Mirror went altogether dark, as dark as if a hole had opened in the world of sight, and Frodo looked into emptiness. In the black abyss there appeared a single Eye that slowly grew, until it filled nearly the whole Mirror. So terrible was it that Frodo stood rooted, unable to cry out or to withdraw his gaze. The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing. (LotR, 364)

The first sight of the terrible enemy makes Frodo aware of his duty as Ring-bearer. He understands he is the only one who can carry out the task. The eye appears to Frodo for the second time when he is on the summit of Amon Hen, while he is using the Ring and seats upon the ancient chair which enables him to see virtually all over Middle-earth:

And suddenly he felt the Eye. There was an eye in the Dark Tower that did not sleep. He knew that it had become aware of his gaze. A fierce eager will was there. It leaped towards him; almost like a finger he felt it, searching for him. [...] He heard himself crying out: *Never, never!* Or was it: *Verily I come, I come to you?* He could not tell. (LotR, 401)

The encounter with the eye makes Frodo choose between succumbing and reacting. It is a test, which lets Frodo understand how big the evil he is opposing to is, and which brings him to the resolution of continuing the journey alone, in order not to involve other people in the harm which the Ring causes inevitably. In both cases, Sauron appears as a presence, an embodiment of evil pervading the narration, more than a true character. He has the function of the antagonist, but he is not truly characterized or developed at all. He is the only “mute” character in the story, he never speaks directly for the entire length of the narration. Since we know how much Tolkien was concerned with language and words, the fact that Sauron lacks a voice seems to be a deliberate choice. Evil does not need to have a

face and a personality. Evil simply exists and it is constantly threatening good, and this is exactly what Sauron represents in the story.

The other great villain of *The Lord of the Rings* is Saruman. Originally, he was the chief of the wizards, and he too opposed Sauron. Once a good friend of Gandalf, Saruman was then seduced by Sauron's power and became his major ally. He is settled at the tower of Isengard and is responsible for destroying part of Fangorn forest, a deed which will rebound on him. His voice possesses the gift of persuasion, as Aragorn notes:

Once he was as great as his fame made him. His knowledge was deep, his thought was subtle, and his hands marvellously skilled; and he had a power over the minds of others. The wise he could persuade, and the smaller folk he could daunt. That power he certainly still keeps. There are not many in Middle-earth that I should say were safe, if they were left alone to talk with him. (LotR, 567)

Unlike Sauron, Saruman wishes to submit Middle-earth not to exercise power itself, but to change its order. He would enslave all the free folk and force them into a system which recalls the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. His departure from good coincides with his worship of the machine, and indeed Treebeard states that the wizard's mind is corrupted, being made of "metal and wheels":

There was a time when he was always walking about my woods. He was polite in those days [...]; his face, as I remember it [...] became like windows in a stone wall: windows with shutters inside. I think that I now understand what he is up to. He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment. And now it is clear that he is a black traitor. (LotR, 473)

Through the character of Saruman evil is declined in a different way compared to Sauron.

As we have seen, the Dark Lord embodies the essence of evil, in the same way as villains do in folktales. Saruman is a developing character, who takes part actively in the events of the story. As many other characters too, he shows how the choice of evil, even though it may look the winning and easiest one at first, leads to defeat and death.

On the side of the good characters, the heroes are Frodo and Aragorn. The two are antithetical in most ways, but they share a pure soul and the pursuit of good. Frodo is probably the character who the author pays more attention to. He is representative of : “the poor, weak, or downtrodden hero” in the same way as Bilbo, the protagonist of *the Hobbit* is; besides, they are both: “middle-aged, domestic, and decidedly unheroic figures”<sup>19</sup>, though Frodo is far more a psychologically complex and detailed character. Frodo embodies the virtues of simplicity, calm and kindness, which distinguish all the hobbits. His height suggests that he is more child-like than a brave hero. Mathews comments upon this:

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's hero is asked to define himself by renouncing power and possessiveness. Frodo is unable to do so alone. His name itself lacks grandeur and stature, and the hero figure is hardly godlike. In fact, he is not even human, but a hobbit, a diminutive creature, nearer to Men than Elves or Dwarves.<sup>20</sup>

Frodo – following the scheme of the Bildungsroman – grows consistently during his journey, he is meant to be a round and sympathetic character. When he leaves the Shire, he is an innocent creature, unaware of danger and evil, who is forced to start an adventure against his will. He is cast, to an unknown degree, into events which he does not even comprehend. Mathews has defined this type of hero as “the vertical hero”:

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19 Haase, Donald. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008. p. 977

20 Mathews, Richard. *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. New York: Twayne, 1997. p. 90

Tolkien's vertical hero emerges not from communal hall but from hobbit hole and struggles upward to the peaks of a monumental cosmic battle of good and evil, surrounded by, but ultimately cut off, from others engaged in the struggle. (129)

After he acquires knowledge of what the enemy is and what the victory of evil would represent for the world, Frodo decides to bear the burden of the Ring, even if it could mean that there may not be a journey back. He decides to immolate himself for the greater good. In the same way as Sauron may evoke Satan, Frodo might recall the messianic figure of Jesus Christ. The journey towards Mordor is a difficult *via crucis*, full of suffering and loss. Unlike Jesus though, in the end Frodo is not able to go all the way. At the very moment when he finally has the chance to destroy the Ring in the Cracks of Mount Doom, he is overcome by its power: "I have come," he said. "But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" (LotR, 945). Unexpectedly, a sort of divine providence or grace acts in the form of Gollum, which manages to take the Ring off from Frodo, and fall in the depths of fire from where the Ring had been created. Frodo eventually is able to go back to the Shire, although he will never adjust to his previous life. That is why he will be allowed to leave for the Undying Lands. Frodo's journey does not exactly resolve in a happy ending then, but more in a bittersweet hue. D. Harvey developed this idea further, to the point that he sees in Frodo a modern form of tragic hero:

Frodo is an ordinary individual who becomes involved in the great affairs of the world. His involvement allows us to see in him the nobility and at the same time the weaknesses or flaws of his character. [...] It is with awe and wonder that we see him reach journey's end. [...] Up until this moment, Frodo's struggle and his development have elevated him from a rustic and ordinary hobbit to an individual possessed of great attributes – courage, determination, justice, pity, mercy, wisdom, compassion and sympathy. He deserves to achieve his Quest. But at the moment of



his triumph comes his tragedy. Having achieved the heights of respect, admiration and achievement, he falls.<sup>21</sup>

Frodo's tragedy lies within his deliberate choice not to destroy the Ring. What he has experienced during the journey leaves indelible marks, a new burden for his mind. From the moment he has taken possession of the Ring, Frodo is doomed to be restless. And it is not only the memory of physical and mental sufferings that haunts him, but also regret for what he has not been able to do. As Tolkien himself stated: "It was not only nightmare memories of past horrors that afflicted him, but also unreasoning self-reproach: he saw himself and all that he had done as a broken failure" (Letters, 328).

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<sup>21</sup> Harvey, David. *The song of Middle-earth: J.R.R. Tolkien's themes, symbols and myths*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1985. p. 77-8

Aragorn embodies the ideal of the chivalric hero of the epic tradition. He was raised by the elves unaware of his heritage as legitimate king of Men, until he was ready to accept it. He falls in love with the daughter of the elvish king Elrond, and in order to marry her he has to accomplish his destiny and become King. Despite his status of man, he is perceived to be less human than the hobbits. He seems to be a hero of the past, a knight in shining armour: brave, extremely vigorous in battle, wise and loyal. He resists the greatest temptation of all, that of the ring of power, and elevates from the nomadic ranger Strider, to “Aragorn, son of Arathorn, called Elessar, Dúnadan, the heir of Isildur Elendil's son of Gondor”. His too is a growing journey, but it is deprived of the empathy which Frodo's provokes. It is a journey which he undertakes because he needs to prove his value. Besides, Aragorn's success depends on Frodo's. He might achieve his role of sovereign, but there will be hope only when evil will be defeated, and this is the task which was assigned to Frodo. In Mathews' definitions, while Frodo is a vertical hero, Aragorn is a horizontal one. The horizontal hero:

struggles to know himself and to share himself in love with another, to affirm his tribe's rights, land, and values against encroachments of an enemy [...] He rejects the contrived supernatural force that would preserve his life, for it would at the same time separate him from his tribe and from his very identity as a man.<sup>22</sup>

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Mathews continues, the upward or downward actions by the vertical hero are favoured and emphasized more than the ones of the hero who “struggles horizontally on a plain, where values must be determined without the benefit of divine intervention” (Mathews, 92). The fallibility of the vertical hero is what makes him akin to our human essence. On the contrary, the superiority of the character of Aragorn leads to

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22 Ibid. 20

the perception of him as a an ideal, more than a real person. Juxtaposed to Frodo as tragic hero, Harvey regards Aragorn as the quest hero; his journey is: “the Quest to retain his throne and his rightful heritage [which] must be achieved by the demonstration and discovery of the inner self.”<sup>23</sup> His supernatural allure reinforces the distance between his character and the reader: he is the only one able to command the cursed Dead at his service, and then release them from their curse. In Minas Tirith, when the process towards kingship is almost at his climax, he is endowed with the power of healing by the laying hands, what Harvey defined as a “medieval touch [...] in common to the great rulers of myth” (Harvey, 91). This moment represents a climax, as it accomplishes the prophecy: “*The hands of the king are the hands of the healer. And so shall the rightful king be known*” (LotR, 860). The prophecy carries definite Christian resonances: Aragorn, like Christ, is a king and a healer. His marriage with Arwen provides the typical fairy-tale happy ending, which is then symbolically highlighted by the nature blessing, in the form of sapling of White Tree. With this event, “the circle is complete” (Harvey, 91) and they lived happily ever after.

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23 Ibid 21, p. 87

### 3.2 Hybrid Identities and Metamorphosis

Among the most interesting characters of Middle-earth there are those undefined creatures, which do not fall into the main categories of Men, Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, and are not wizards either. The first of this kind that we encounter in the narration is Tom Bombadil. He is described as an old man, bigger than hobbits, though quite short for one of the Big People. He is curiously dressed with great yellow boots and a blue coat, he has a long brown beard and bright blue eyes (LotR, 119). His mate, Goldberry, daughter of the river, explains to the hobbits that he is “the Master of wood, water and hill”, though he is not a owner, he is the caretaker of all growing and living things (LotR, 124). In the morphology of the narration, he performs the function of the guardian, the magical helper and guide. He belongs to those archetypal characters, which are possible to find in fairy tales. Shippey examined the character of Tom, and concluded that:

He is exceptionally close to, and in some ways is a mirror of, Nature. His ancientness is not disputed, and he is generally considered to be in some sense Treebeard's senior. He able to resist the Ring not only because he has the power to do so, but because its temptation of power is absolutely no consequence to him. He is thought to be a unique being [...] Perhaps the word that best sums up the general feeling about Tom is his *primality*.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Tom proclaims himself the “Eldest”, he states that he existed before “the river and the trees, [...] the first raindrop and the first acorn [...] and before the seas were bent” (LotR, 131), he was already there before all the peoples of Middle-earth, in a very distant age. Tom is particularly detailed as far as physical appearance. Tolkien had a precise idea

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<sup>24</sup> Shippey, Tom. *Leaves from the tree: J.R.R. Tolkien's shorter fiction*. London: The Society, 1991. p. 83

of how it was supposed to look, in fact Shippey noted, at an extra-literary level Tom was inspired by a Dutch doll that belonged to the professor's eldest son and was one of the heroes of the stories that were told to the children at bedtime<sup>25</sup>. At an allegorical level, Tolkien claimed that Tom aimed at representing “the vanishing countryside of Oxfordshire and Berkshire, and a spirit of total detachment and non-involvement with issues of morality and control” (Shippey, 83). Tom is arguably regarded as the personification of Middle-earth's spirit of the place. He is benevolent, though not concerned in taking part into the events of the world. Finally, regarding his function as magical helper, Mathews notes that it is Tom's only presence which works as positive sign: “he brings a clear breath of joy and hope into the journey, which he conveys in his treatment of the Ring” (Mathews, 68). He is the only character, who is completely uninterested in power and its symbol, the Ring. As such he provides a new (perhaps utopian) possibility to behave and live:

The story is cast in terms of a good side, and a bad side [...] ; but both sides want a measure of control, but if you have, as it were taken a ‘vow of poverty’ renounced control, and take your delight in things themselves without reference to yourself, watching, observing, and to some extent knowing, then the question of the rights and wrongs of power and control might become utterly meaningless to you, and the means of power quite valueless. (Letters, 178-9)

Treebeard too, in the same way as Bombadil, is a hybrid creature who does not want to be involved in questions of power and conflict, but ultimately decides to take sides and take part in the war, as it involves the life of trees. Since his identity has already been discussed in “On the importance of the Tree”, let us move to another hybrid character, who proves

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<sup>25</sup> More on this in: Carpenter, Humphrey. *J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography*. London: HarperCollins, 1990.

essential for the story: Gollum. It is the result of a degenerative metamorphosis of a hobbit-kind creature named Sméagol. Gandalf narrates his story to Frodo, to explain how the Ring has come to his possession through Bilbo. Once a curious creature, he used to live in strong contact with nature, but he then “ceased to look up at the hill-tops, or the leaves on trees, or the flowers opening in the air: his head and his eyes were downward” (LotR, 53). From the first moment he sees the Ring, Sméagol falls under its spell. He strangled a friend that had found it just to take possession of it, and since then the Ring has mastered his will. Sméagol became more cunning and hurtful, he started whispering alone and “gurgling in his throat, so they called him Gollum” (LotR, 53), until he was cursed and expelled from his family and society. The process of distortion of Gollum's character increases the more he departs from nature. This suggests he is in fact becoming a non natural being. It culminates when, while he was wandering alone, he realizes he cannot stand the light anymore: “He wondered at it, for he had almost forgotten about the Sun. Then for the last time he looked up and shook his fist at her” until the moment when, finally: “he found a little cave and he wormed his way like a maggot into the heart of the hills, and vanished out of knowledge.” (LotR, 54) From then on, Gollum will live exclusively for the Ring; yet – Gandalf argues – he is not wholly ruined, there might still be a small part of his mind still unconsumed by the Ring, though there is little hope to cure him (LotR, 55). The battle between good and evil takes place constantly in Gollum's mind. He develops two personalities, one aiming at good and the most powerful one, the corrupted side, which will ultimately take over. When Bilbo finds the Ring, he has the possibility to kill Gollum, but for mercy and pity he does not. Frodo too, will show compassion once he will understand the damnation which afflicts Gollum's life. Grace pervades these act of generosity, and it continues to shape the destiny. This is apparent with Gollum's death, which fulfils the

prophecies of Gandalf: “my heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end” (LotR, 59) and Frodo: “Begone, and trouble me no more! If you touch me ever again, you shall be cast yourself into the Fire of Doom.” (LotR, 944). It has been noted that Gollum represents a reflection of Frodo, some kind of alter-ego, or at least what he could become if he let the Ring control him (Harvey, 79). Therefore, Gollum represents a living reminder for the protagonist, a negative example which encourages him to stay on the right side.

### 3.3 On the origins of the peoples of Middle-earth

In the creation of his characters, Tolkien is indebted to many sources. At this point, it should already be clear that by the term “Sub-creation” he did not mean a deliberate original act of creation, but more of a conscious recuperation of “dainty bits” which have always been boiling in “the “Cauldron of Story” (Faerie, 27). Ancient elements from the so-called Cauldron of story can be freely chosen or replaced in the making of a new story. After an author has done his research, he must think of the effect that ancient elements and characters produce now, in the present (Faerie, 31-32). Therefore, the context, the personality of characters and their actions will be shaped depending on the effect that the author wishes to provoke. All this to say, that Tolkien took very seriously the task of recuperation of sources for the creation of his work. The mythological attribute which he bestows the story of the Ring with, may make us assume that his characters come from some other mythological traditions. Actually, Tolkien's characters originate from their language. In 1945, Tolkien became Professor of English Language and Literature at Merton College of Oxford University. In the same way as other scholars of Old English literature, he was professionally and personally interested in Old Norse literature<sup>26</sup>. His studies focused on Old English and Old Norse, which shared the same Germanic roots. To analyse the philological studies and production by Tolkien is not the scope of this piece. However, it is important to make clear that his characters originated basically from the knowledge of and passion for those languages. It is thank to philological studies that Tolkien came in contact with the characters of Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse literature: archetypal characters such as “Deor, the Wanderer, the Seafarer” (St. Clair, 3) which

<sup>26</sup> St. Clair, Gloriana. *Tolkien's Cauldron: Northern Literature and The Lord of the Rings*. Pittsburgh: G. St. Clair. 2000. ch II. p. 1



notably contributed to shape his imaginary world. Among the main sources of Tolkien, as also stated in his Letters, we find *Beowulf*, the *Volsunga Saga* – the Old Norse version of the story of Sigurd and the dragon Fafnir (St. Clair, 3), and the *Kalevala*, which reports the main mythological episodes of Finnish culture. In her essay: “An Overview Of the Northern Influences on Tolkien's Works”, St. Clair notes that:

while knowing Northern literature does not provide a key to unlock the meanings of his major works, his characters, creatures, implements, customs, incidents, and themes do have antecedents in the Eddas and sagas. <sup>27</sup>

The Eddas refer both to an anonymous collection of poems dating back to the latter half of the tenth century, as well as to a prose version by Icelandic author Snorri Sturluson from the early thirteenth century. As a matter of fact, the only characters which were invented anew are the Hobbits. And still, St. Clair observed, they possess some traits in common with characters from Northern family sagas: an exaggerated sense of hospitality, a deep interest in heritage and ancestors, a liking for curious clothes and an innate shyness which distinguishes their species. Hobbits were created to fill a gap in Middle-earth's mythology, which, without them, would be peopled only by “fallen descendants of a golden age, locked in cosmic battle on a mortal stage”<sup>28</sup>. While the other peoples of Middle-earth strive to achieve power and to cope with everyday life in a corrupted world, Hobbit's life is rendered as a pragmatic utopia, where it is possible to enjoy the small pleasures of life without worries. To this extent they remind the reader of Tom Bombadil and his simple way of living. But Hobbits do not represent an abstract embodiment of Nature, they provide a model of dealing with life which aims at inspiring Men (both, Men of the story

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27 St. Clair, Gloriana. “An Overview Of the Northern Influences on Tolkien's Works”. 1995. in: *Mythlore* 80, Mallorn 30 (Milton Keynes, England and Altadena, California: The Tolkien Society and the Mythopoeic Press, 1995), p. 63-67

28 Mathews, Richard. *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. New York: Twayne, 1997. p. 92

and real life readers); as a matter of fact, Tolkien himself thought “the hobbit-model” was replicable in real life, he himself stated that he lived in the “Shire” (in reality, Sarehole Mill, near Birmingham), he was a hobbit in all but size, he liked nature, especially gardens, trees and animals, he smoked the pipe and liked genuine unrefrigerated food – mushrooms especially (Letters, 288-9)<sup>29</sup>. As far as Elves and especially Dwarves are concerned, they were both present in the Eddas and undoubtedly had a great influence on the versions of Middle-earth, with regard to characteristics and names. More in detail, eight characters from Tolkien are said to have “significant sources in specific individuals or types of individuals in Northern literature”<sup>30</sup>, namely Aragorn, Beorn, Boromir, Denethor, Eowyn, Faramir, Galadriel and Théoden. Yet, particularly interesting is the comparison which St. Clair made between the wizard Gandalf and the Norse Odin, god of poetry, knowledge and magic. Gandalf is a mystic figure. In the same way as the main protagonists Frodo and Aragorn, his journey leads to different challenges which he has to fight in order to reach a higher status. His powers and will are tested: he confronts Saruman and the Balrog and even the temptation of taking the Ring for himself, but he always emerges as winner. He even experiences a metamorphosis after he has defeated death itself, in the battle against the Balrog. Improving his wisdom and knowledge of all things, Gandalf the Grey symbolically becomes Gandalf the White. In the story, he provides security, hope and advice for the Fellowship, and he seems to be the torch that all other characters need to shed light onto their paths. He acts as a mentor to Frodo and Aragorn, and indeed it is possible to say that he somehow fulfils the role of the “fairy godmother”. Tolkien imagined Gandalf as an “Odinic wanderer”, as he wrote in a letter to his son Christopher (Letters, 119). Critics tried to trace back the similarities between the two, but many also pointed at

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29 More on this in: Bramlett, Perry C., and Joe R. Christopher. *I am in fact a hobbit: an Introduction to the Life and Work of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Macon, GA: Mercer U Press, 2004.

30 Ibid. 27

the differences. D. Day even stated that Odin was Tolkien's primary source of inspiration for Sauron, given that – but not only because – Odin was symbolized by a ring in Norse tradition.<sup>31</sup> Also, Odin had the appearance of a one-eyed lord. Notably, throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron is represented with a great single eye. Later in his work, Day admits that in his physical appearance, Odin was the model for the subsequent wandering wizards of literature, from Merlin to Gandalf<sup>32</sup> (Day, 31). What is certain, is that the figure of Odin inspired Tolkien. Apart from characters, the similarities between the Norse mythology and *The Lord of the Rings* are consistent also for other aspects. Again, Day provides interesting information on this when he notes how “Middle-earth” is a literally translation of the Norse “Midgard”. Moreover, the immortal gods of the Norsemen, Aesir and Vanir, seem to have become the Ainur and Valar in Tolkien's legendarium (Day, 31). Many other resemblances are pointed out by Day and St. Clair, but the ones already observed probably prove enough of connection between the Norse mythological tradition and Middle-earth.

The study of literary sources is a vast sea to venture, and it cannot be exhaustively addressed in the span of a subchapter. At any rate, the peoples of Middle-earth are the result of a long literary tradition, which mostly recalls old Scandinavian folktales. Surely though, the list of those works which inspired Tolkien's creation of his universe is much longer. A. Petrina would add the German *Nibelungenlied* in the use of a ring as promoting force for the story, the E.R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922), and the other acknowledged main source: *Beowulf*.<sup>33</sup> To conclude, in Tolkien's biography H. Carpenter

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31 Day, David. *Tolkien's Ring*. UK: HarperCollins, 1994. p. 20

32 More on this in: Day, David. “The God of the Ring”. *Tolkien's Ring*. UK: HarperCollins, 1994.

33 Tosi, Laura, and Alessandra Petrina. *Dall'ABC a Harry Potter storia della letteratura inglese per l'infanzia e la gioventù*. Bologna: Bononia U Press, 2011. ch 13: “Nuovi mondi, altri universi: la fantasy dal secondo dopoguerra a oggi”. p. 325-6

indicated *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl* and the Arthurian cycle as the major English sources of inspiration for Middle-earth's characters and landscapes (Carpenter, 68). The appeal of *The Lord of the Rings'* characters might lay also in the fascination with their ancient heritage. At any rate, source studies shed light on a new level of depth in Tolkien's masterpiece.

### 3.4 Why do we care? A Matter of Reader's Identification

This conclusive subchapter is intended as a survey of the main reasons that have made *The Lord of the Rings* so popular. Even though the response by the reading public was not immediate, it has later been incredibly positive:

Its unparalleled commercial success only really began [...] in 1959. By 1968 three million copies of *The Lord of the Rings* had been sold. The late 60s especially saw the worldwide Tolkien cult, of which the more absurd manifestations [...] are too well known to dwell on.<sup>34</sup>

At present times, the book has sold more than 150 million copies worldwide. Such a success has not yet stopped; on the contrary, it is still growing, at the point that rightly Rosebury defined it as a “cultural phenomenon”<sup>35</sup>. It achieved new recognition as a consequence of the success of Peter Jackson's cinematic adaptations (2001-2003)<sup>36</sup>, which made the story of the Ring easily accessible to a large public, and promoted a new interest in the books too. One of the reasons behind such a great involvement, might lay in the applicability that the story has at a psychological level. In Rosebury's words:

The relation of any work of fiction to reality is ultimately demonstrated, not by its literal correspondence to fact [...] but by its capacity to evoke a psychological response in readers – a response which could not be evoked by the imaginative conceptions of fiction unless at some level those conceptions were intelligible to readers on the basis of actual 'historical' correlatives.<sup>37</sup>

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34 Rosebury, Brian. *Tolkien: a Critical Assessment*. A New York: St. Martin's Place, 1992. p. 129

35 Rosebury, Brian. *Tolkien: a Cultural Phenomenon*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

36 More on this: Croft, Janet Brennan. *Tolkien on Film: Essays on Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings*. Altadena, CA: Mythopoeic, 2004.

37 Ibid. 35 p. 20

Indeed, the depth of characters might be among the main reasons why the reader finds the emotions, which the reading of *The Lord of the Rings* provokes, familiar. The reader experiences a process of Identification with characters, which depends on various aspects: sympathy with the character, empathy for a character's particular situation and attraction<sup>38</sup>. As a result, “a psychological response in readers” is in fact evoked. Yet, the appeal which the story possesses transcends the category of characters. As already stated previously, landscape also plays a major role. In fact, the process of Identification is involved at the level of reader's fascination for the environment too. The more the reader is fascinated by the landscape of the story, the more he/she will feel the urge to go back there. Still, there seems to be something more which arouses the interest of the reading public, an attraction to the values which are proper of the Epic fantasy genre. It is because “it gives us courage and persistence” E. Bear says; further: “Epic Fantasy is built into us, part of our most fundamental human fabric, and in a way it has a sacredness that all stems from our paradoxical awareness of our own mortality” E. Hoffman adds<sup>39</sup>. To conclude, Strauss notes:

In Epic Fantasy, the principal characters' lives and actions acquire immense meaning and importance within the pattern of a series of hugely significant events. Their lives *matter*. This is the very opposite of most people's real lives, and one of the major reasons, I think, why Epic Fantasy has such enduring appeal.<sup>40</sup>

Another aspect of the novel, which encouraged a positive response by the reading public, may be the moral of the story. The message which echoes in the reader's mind, is that

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38 Hühn, Peter, Jan Christoph Meister, John Pier, and Wolf Schmid. *Handbook of narratology*. Berlin: W.de Gruyter, 2014.

39 Jones, Jeremy L.C. "Something Greater: An Epic Discussion of Epic Fantasy, Part 1." *Clarkesworld Magazine*. July 2011. Web. 02 Feb. 2017.

[http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/epic\\_interview1/](http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/epic_interview1/)

40 Ibid. 39

renewal and redemption are possible, and that the destiny is shaped according to everyone personal choices, which can be good or bad. The universal moral, though rather immediate, is developed on multiple situations and at different degrees. Furthermore, it is accompanied by other messages cherished by the author, and connected to specific situations.

It is interesting that *The Lord of the Rings* has affected not only the reader as individual, but also groups of people. In 1985, E.G. Bormann formulated the “Symbolic convergence theory of communication”, which aims at explaining the establishment of a “group consciousness, with its implied shared emotions, motives, and meanings [...] in terms of socially shared narrations or fantasies”<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, there are countless groups of people who join together with the intention to provide a “creative and imaginative shared interpretation” of *The Lord of the Rings*, in order to fulfil: “a group psychological or rhetorical need” (Bormann, 130). Some texts, Bormann further argued, receive a particularly favourable response by readers, for their function of fulfilment of a shared, universal need – be it the need for escape and consolation, or the empathy, sympathy and affection for characters and places of the story. *The Lord of the Rings* offers a convincing world where evil exists but can be defeated. It is reassuring as it presents a set of values shared by an enormous number of other readers. In terms of fan response, *The Lord of the Rings* has yet been difficult to equal. As a result, it is possible to argue that its capacity of satisfying the reader's needs is entitled to be proportionally outstanding.

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41 Bormann, Ernest G. "Symbolic Convergence Theory: A Communication Formulation" in: "Homo-Narrans: Story-telling in Mass Culture and Everyday Life." *Journal of Communication* 35 (1985): 128-30.

## CONCLUSION

When one has to deal with a vast piece of work, which has its roots in a complex mythological body of other works, it will be necessary to choose a perspective from where to look upon the story. *The Lord of the Rings* in particular, offers continuous layers of reading and multiple themes to comment upon. Therefore, as a start, I tried to organize my work by giving an overview of what the labels of “fantasy” and “fantastic” mean and meant in the past. This has led to the identification of a more specific definition of what genre *The Lord of the Rings* belongs to, namely, Epic Fantasy. Epic has a strong bond with myth, and in Tolkien's story especially epic elements and mythic ones are closely connected. Myth originally exists with the function of explaining events which cannot be understood through experience. I have used the essay by U. Le Guin and the psychological approach by C. Jung, to investigate the impact of the myth and archetypes on the readers. Tolkien defended myths and their importance for society in his meta-literary poem *Mythopoeia*, which – in the same way as *On Fairy-stories*, though in a different form – also sheds light on the reasons why myth and fantasy stories are relevant in the present. The first chapter about genre, provides a background research.

My study about the landscapes and environment of Middle-earth started when I realized that the perceived sense of place, the *genius loci*, which the reader feels with *The Lord of the Rings*, possibly represents one of the reasons that made the book so enchanting. Indeed, following R. Muir's notions of perceived landscape and landscapes of the mind, it seemed I was finally grasping the reasons why the sense of place plays such a great role in a reader's mind: landscape represents heritage, history, it constitutes the scenery for actions, it is often symbolic and it bears connotations which influence perception during



the reading. The first landscape which the author presents in the story is the Shire. I felt this setting in particular carries various meanings; its bond with the pastoral tradition and what that entails, create a powerful image in the reader's mind. In *The Lord of the Rings*, landscape is declined as a threatened environment too. Tolkien's profound love for nature led him to have environmental awareness already in the mid of the twentieth century. During the reading, it is not difficult to become aware that the tree is an important symbol in the story. But only if we focus on all the details it is possible to perceive fully how central it is. In the figure of the tree are condensed echoes from Tolkien's Christian beliefs, Nordic mythologies and unconditional love for nature. With its potentially infinite branches, it also becomes a symbol for the set of all stories in the world. I also considered the short story *Leaf by Niggle*, where the tree is part of an allegory of life and the artist's process of creation. As far as narration is concerned, trees are influential at the level of forest too. Forests represent both, an intricate labyrinth hard to cross, along with a place where to find shelter and achieve personal growth. The reasoning and coherence which distinguish Tolkien's narrative, are well exemplified in his careful toponymy and mapping of Middle-earth; the sub-chapter which concerned these parts of the author's work, is intended to highlight once more how important landscape can be in a narration. In the same way as other authors were indicated as fine psychologists of their characters, Tolkien can perhaps be regarded as a geographer for his thorough attention to landscape. The fact that so much consideration has been given to place, does not imply that Tolkien's characters have to be puppets acting on a beautiful stage. Although characters of fantasy fiction might have been often discarded as poorly constructed, I think *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates that it is actually possible to build complex personalities within a realm of Faërie. And indeed, the story of the Ring is rich in elaborate characters, some of which are

symbolical or “flat” – to use Forster's words – and some others are multifaceted, rich in layers and “round”. The sub-chapter on hybrid identities and metamorphic creatures shows how rich the panorama of species of Middle-earth is. Furthermore, such characters are given a peculiar attention, they represent key figures for the developing of the story and they introduce important themes: behind Tom Bombadil there is the idea that Nature is fundamentally good. Nature cannot be involved directly in other creatures' lives, it exists for its own sake. The character of Treebeard represents the spirit of trees, which must be cherished and respected to avoid regrettable consequences. Finally, Gollum bears the ultimate message of the story: he is the living embodiment of the battle between good and evil, and he shows how power can be self-destructive. The brief look at the origins of characters of the story, shows how a careful refashioning of typical characters from the Faërie world – such as Elves, Dwarves, Wizards, Orcs, Trolls and Goblins and so on – can be productive if invigorated with elements of originality and a powerful message. This is the basis of Tolkien's creative process, an idea which, in a circular motion, bring us back to *On Fairy-stories* and the discourse on genre. The last point I addressed to was the reception of the story of the Ring by its reading public. This was the actual first question I had asked myself before the choice to dedicate my research on *The Lord of the Rings*: why do so many people care about the story of a hobbit and a ring? Given that it is probably not possible to provide an all-encompassing, satisfactory answer – I found the belief that the applicability of the message behind characters and land, along with the fascination which a beautiful constructed work of fantasy provokes, may provide at least a glimpse of response. *The Lord of the Rings* has surely provided the Recovery, Escape and Consolation which Tolkien wanted to arouse in his readers. Perhaps, its success is the best proof of its incredible magic.

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